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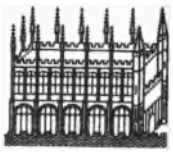
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LUNA



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LUNA:

A MERE LOVE STORY.

BY

MARGARET C. HELMORE.

"LORD, WHAT FOOLS THESE MORTALS BE!"
—*Midsummer Night's Dream.*

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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LUNA:

A MERE LOVE STORY.

INTRODUCTION.

"When we two parted
In silence and tears,
Half broken-hearted,
To sever for years."

MEN are proverbially less patient than women; yet when one of the sterner sex, by an amiable freak of nature, is endowed with a spirit of endurance, he possesses it in a stronger degree than even the most forbearing woman in the world. I think this is the case, but it may only appear to be so from the extreme rarity of the phenomenon, a patient man.

Certainly not many men under the same circumstances would have exercised a like

amount of Christian charity, and with the resignation of a saint—or woman—submitted himself to the inevitable with a good grace, as did Augustus Deshon, one stormy autumn evening, when in the coffee-room of the Pavilion Hotel, Folkestone, Fate threw in his way one of those indefatigably buttonholding, blindly agreeable people that it is one's lot to meet at times, generally when the mind is occupied and loaded with a subject which will not fail to assert itself, and causes one to answer at random in a *distrait* manner to the kindly meant, but highly mistaken and aggravating babble of the opponent, who cannot perceive how utterly misplaced are his efforts at conversation and cordiality.

A man of forty years, yet in appearance aged beyond his prime, with the memory of his past life, its struggles, trials, cares, and its one great love and sorrow crowding full and deep upon his mind that cold October evening, Augustus fain would have been left in peace to dream over the fire, and muse wonderingly as to what would happen when the moment should arrive for which he had that day come down from London, namely, the appearance of

the afternoon steamer from Boulogne, detained some hours by the violence of the weather. The sole occupants of the coffee-room were Augustus Deshon and his agreeable tormentor, a handsome, gentlemanly, well-dressed young man, who talked with the natural ease and grace acquired by general popularity, and a sufficient amount of self-esteem, upon all the subjects of the day, from politics down to the favourite artistes at "Her Majesty's," entering into particulars about his personal history in a remarkably frank and open manner, owning that his reckless extravagance had forced him to resign a commission in the army, speaking affectionately of a wife and two little children in Boulogne, to whom he was returning, regretting for their sakes that circumstances prevented his living in England. "In fact," he said, in a crowning burst of confidence, "I am only here at all under a feigned name. I came over a week ago because an uncle of my wife's has just died, leaving us a little money, and I wanted to see about it. I call myself 'Ireland' here, because that is my native country; if ever you come over to Boulogne, though—which I wish you'd do with all my heart, and we'll

make you entirely welcome—you must look for poor outlawed Charlie Deshon."

"What!" exclaimed Augustus, his weary apathy of manner vanishing as he looked earnestly at the other, "Ireland—Deshon—not of County Donegal?"

"Why indeed, then, I am, of Castle Deshon. Are you acquainted with my family?"

"I believe—nay, it must be so, I think—that I am your half-brother, if you are the son of Lucius Deshon," said Augustus with some emotion.

"Powers! you don't mean to say that you are the long lost prodigal son, of whose existence I was—to my shame be it spoken—utterly oblivious? Not that you were the prodigal at all—that was my character; but, by Jove! what an extraordinary thing that we should meet in this chance way after so many years! How strange that I should have taken such a fancy to your face, and for it never to have entered my head that you could be yourself!"

"Not very strange, Charlie, for you were but a little fellow when we parted twenty years ago," replied his brother. "The strange thing is that I should have been heaping money

together all this time for no living reason save that it came naturally to me, without a thought or care for any of my relations, whilst you have been suffering want and poverty. Forgive my selfishness, dear Charlie."

"Faith! if a man hasn't all the right in the world to spend any cash he may win for himself, I don't know the reason why. From all I remember, my poor mother and you did not hit it off quite smoothly—and it was not to be expected that you should care for her child, who, most unconsciously, believe me, put your nose out of joint," said Charles Deshon, with a good-humoured smile, as he wondered to himself if this newly-found and, by his own showing, prosperous brother, would be disposed to afford him pecuniary assistance in his numerous embarrassments.

"But tell me," he continued, "for you are a subject of wonder and admiration to me; you spoke just now of being rich, and money-making coming naturally to you. How is it that you, a Deshon, have contrived to avoid the family propensity of getting ruined?"

"Chance—Fate—or perhaps because, when I found that my father's whole affection was

centred in you, the child of his second marriage, I entreated my godfather at Lyons to take me into his counting-house, and acquiring business tastes at an early age, before my father's death and the passing away of our estate into the possession of strangers, I seemed to have slipped out of the family, and become merely a junior partner in the house of 'Durien et Cie., Silk Merchants.'"

"Augustus!" cried his brother, a bright gleam in his eyes and a flush on either cheek. "You have not lost all your individuality? Tell me you are a worthy, loyal 'son of Erin,' and have not spun away *every* spark of patriotism from your nature. You will buy back Castle Deshon? Think of our dear old home—the loveliest place in lovely county Donegal—in the hands of strangers! You are not going to spend the whole of your life in silk weaving?"

"I retired from business nearly a year ago, and have since then been thinking over the recovery of our birthplace; but, except commercially, I am a lazy, apathetic fellow, and deserve any amount of censure from you for my dilatoriness, as well as my neglect of your-

self. But, believe me, had I known that the dear little boy who used to be fond of me was in distress, I would have moved heaven and earth to find and assist him. You must tell me of all your difficulties; your mother was well off—is she still alive?"

"No, she died before I was married; but her fortune had dwindled down considerably by that time. I am living now entirely on my poor little wife's paltry settlement. You'll come over to Boulogne and see her—and the brats, bless them—won't you? You are not crossing to-night, I think you said?"

"No; but I will come to you very shortly, directly I have arranged the business which has brought me here. How thoroughly the wind has abated since we have been talking. Waiter, is the Boulogne steamer in sight yet?"

The man had approached to say that the boat was then entering the harbour, and Augustus, with a "Good-bye; God bless you, Charlie: I will be with you before many days," hurriedly wrung his brother's hand, and hastened from the room and out of the hotel.

But few passengers had crossed in that

evening's packet, and Augustus, with quickly-beating heart, looked eagerly at each person ascending the steps on to the quay.

Charles Deshon had followed him, not contented with his farewell, and curious to learn whom or what his brother was expecting; but Augustus was unaware of his presence. The moon was shining as she often does shine upon the sea, and the light was bright and clear as day—bright enough to show poor Charles that he was not wanted there, for that the thoughts of Augustus were entirely occupied by some subject of more passionate interest than that of his newly-found brother.

He only waited to hear "Mon Dieu! c'est Auguste," ejaculated by a pale lady dressed in mourning, in reply to Augustus's "I am here by command of your cousin, madame," and then he went back quietly to the Pavilion, collected his luggage, paid his bill, and went away across the Channel, leaving a few lines of adieu, with his address at Boulogne, for his brother before starting.

Through some carelessness of the hotel servants, this note never reached its destination.

Twenty years before this night of which I have written, it had been the ill luck of Augustus Deshon, then a mere clerk in his godfather's manufactory, to love and be again beloved by the beautiful Diane Durien, only daughter and heiress of a partner in the firm.

It was one of those frequent cases of two hearts created specially for each other, meeting and growing quickly into love, whilst scarcely aware of it, and lookers-on being able to see and judge more of the game than the players in it themselves. Diane's parents discovered the state of affairs in time as they believed to prevent the mischief going very far: Augustus had never had any opportunity of declaring his love in words, and Diane was too timid, too young, and too well brought up to plead her certainty of his affection, and her own regard for him, as an excuse for refusing the proposals of the rich suitor to whom her relations wished to marry her.

The young, beautiful, but melancholy Marquise La Grange for more than a year of her wedded life was an object of admiration or envy to all the gay people of Paris. But gradually queer rumours got abroad: Madame's

fair cheeks grew thinner and paler, she was less frequently to be met in brilliant crowded assemblages; and though no one could see any trace of it in his behaviour to her, people said that the Marquis ill-treated her.

That she had a lover was also surmised, but the chill, sad reserve of Diane's manner towards any gentleman who paid court to her dispelled the possibility of the slightest scandal concerning her, no one in Paris having heard of the poor Irish lad working his way along at her father's looms.

Soon the La Granges were missed entirely from society, and it was known that the Marquis had inherited his family's doom, and was mad. His unfortunate wife returned to her parents' house for a while, but shortly after the worse than widowhood of Diane, both Monsieur and Madame Durieu died; and Madame La Grange, who after one meeting with Augustus found that neither of them could hide their feelings from the other, made her home in a distant province, with some relations of her husband, to avoid the pain and grief of constantly encountering her lover—they had scarcely met six times between her

marriage and this night when she arrived in England, and save on the first occasion, hardly a word had passed between them.

They were alone in the sitting-room which Augustus had engaged for the lady, and Madame La Grange drew shiveringly towards the fire.

"Aglaïe sent you to me?" she said with her face averted. "Had she an intent in bidding you come to meet me? did she know, I wonder, what we were to each other years ago? Oh, Monsieur! are you well—are you happy?"

She hid her face in her thin white hands for very shame, as she found herself thus reminding the man who had hitherto remained seemingly so calm and passionless of that old love which had probably been long extinguished in his breast. But she need not have doubted his faith and constancy.

"Diane," he answered her, "why mock me by asking whether I am *happy?* Loving you, how can I be happy apart from you? I told you that my love would only cease to be when I died, and even then it cannot part from me, for love is stronger than death. You commanded me years ago, as a proof of my love, to avoid you, to spare you and myself misery

or shame, and I obeyed. I never since then have seen you save by accident, never spoken to you till to-night. Forgive me, Diane; I will not offend you."

He meant that he would not make love to her, but he had taken her two unresisting hands in his own, and she was sobbing on his breast.

"You do not love me!" she cried; "you cannot love me still—you do not. Ah, me!"

"Diane," he exclaimed in a stifled voice, "if your kind, pitiful woman's heart is spared the pain it would be to know how I have suffered, how I do still suffer, through my burning love for you, I am glad for your sake. Oh, my love, my darling, I hunger for you! It is torture to be with you, and yet I dread the moment when you will bid me go. Oh, Diane, let me stay! Do not drive me from you this time, my soul! Oh, our God is cruel to us—we have loved so long, so long!"

Auguste, is it possible that you do not know—has no one told you? I am free, Monsieur! Bless God with me—if you do love me—He has taken my poor husband away from all his misery. I am a widow!"

The following day Augustus escorted Madame La Grange to London, to the house of a favourite cousin, with whom she had purposed making a long visit, choosing, out of consideration for the limited means and small establishment of Mademoiselle Albin, to travel without an attendant; and in the course of a few weeks these two lovers were married, and the twenty years of wretched waiting soon seemed only like a dream, and the memory of them almost vanished in their newly-found happiness. And life, too, with Augustus and his wife, their minds solely occupied with the bliss they had so unexpectedly attained, was a sweet delirium of perfect peace and contentment, and twelve brief months of wedded love passed speedily away.

Then came an awakening for Augustus, and bitterly did he blame his intense and selfish forgetfulness.

Though Castle Deshon was again the property of its hereditary owner, who, less from his country's patriotic regard of land and birthplace, than the desire of bestowing upon his beloved wife and the little heir she hoped soon to give him the dignity attaching to the

possession of an ancestral home, had arranged the purchase of it before his marriage, the promise that he would quickly go to and assist his younger brother seemed utterly to have passed from the mind of Augustus till, in the obituary one day, his eye caught this advertisement :

" On the 1st instant, at Boulogne-sur-Mer, of scarlatina, Charles Deshon, aged 30."

Whilst Augustus with his own riches had been living so happily and luxuriously, he thought perhaps his poor Charlie had died in actual want, certainly in poverty.

That they might render any help or comfort that lay in their power to Charles Deshon's widow and her little children, Augustus and his wife immediately went over to Boulogne, and it was there soon afterwards, and of the same sickness that had killed her brother-in-law, that Diane Deshon died, having two days previously given birth to a daughter, the heroine of these pages.

CHAPTER I.

"All in the blue unclouded weather,
Tirra lirra, by the river,
Sang Sir Lancelot."

It had been an excessively hot day, with scorching sunshine, and a high, unrefreshing wind, reminding one somehow of zephyrs wafted from the fans of stout, red-faced, apoplectic women, after dinner.

Having wandered about from room to room, in the vain hope of finding a cool spot in the house, Mrs. Frederick Ross subsided at length into an easy chair placed in the centre of her drawing-room, in the midst of a current of air between the open door and French windows.

"Pleasant, but wrong!" ejaculated Mrs. Ross, and presently was fast asleep.

She was as pretty a little matron of twenty-four as one would wish to see, and especially pretty did she look on this warm July afternoon of which I am writing, as she lay back in the low fauteuil, her soft white little hands clasped together on her lilac muslin lap, the long, black eyelashes sweeping her pale cheeks, her wavy curls becoming sadly roughened by their background of starchy antimacassar.

The lord and master (or, to speak far more correctly, the adoring, obedient slave) of this Mrs. Ross was a colonel in the Coldstream Guards. Their marriage had been a romantic and imprudent affair—romantic inasmuch as they had mutually fallen in love at first sight, imprudent because that after the very briefest acquaintance and courtship they had married upon a lieutenant's pay and a hundred and fifty pounds a year, which formed the combined amount of private fortune the two young lunatics possessed.

Twelve months of economy, simple living, and cheap lodgings did not cause the gallant Guardsman or his wife to regret the step they had taken, though, after the birth of their first child, it was certainly rather vexing to Fred

that his "darling Minnie" should be always watching by the cradle or making live dolls' clothes instead of being able to walk out with him, and the young man would sometimes think to himself regretfully that mending her husband's socks and minding the baby was a hard change from the easy, idle life of his wife before she married him. She was the eldest child of a moderately well-off Irish squire, and had rather disappointed her family by not having selected from the list of her numerous admirers a husband with more brilliant prospects than handsome Fred.

Poverty was knocking hard at the Rosses' door, but Love still liked his quarters too well to be thinking of making his flight out of window, when a certain spinster of enormous age and parsimonious habits died, and most unexpectedly left the whole of her large fortune to her goddaughter, Mrs. Ross.

It never rains but it pours. Scarcely were Captain Ross and his wife and baby established in a pretty house in Eccleston Square, before Fred's great uncle died, bequeathing him £10,000; and so these young folks for the rest of their lives were in the habit of holding

themselves up as an example of the expediency and propriety of marrying for love, and inciting all their friends to be as trusting and unworldlywise as they had been.

It was not in Eccleston Square, however, that Mrs. Ross was taking a siesta on this already-mentioned hot afternoon, but in the drawing-room of a pretty cottage on the banks of the Thames, near Teddington, which Colonel Ross had taken for the summer months, his wife's health not having been strong enough to stand the drag of a London season. Thamis Cottage, as it was called, was situated in a pleasant, shady garden, sloping down to the river, with only a low laurel hedge dividing it from the grounds of a house of somewhat larger size and more pretension, dignified by the imposing title of Riverbank.

The river seemed asleep to-day. People, dreading sunstrokes, had wisely abandoned rowing or paddling till the heat should have subsided; the wind gradually went down, and then the waving branches of the trees were still, and appeared to sleep too. Mrs. Ross, as we know, was slumbering; a tortoiseshell puss and her tabby offspring snoozed peace-

fully under the sofa, and even the clock on the chimney-piece had stopped. It was like the Enchanted Castle in the fairy tale, with only the Prince wanting to complete the tableau; and, indeed, one who would do fairly to enact the part is now dismounting from his horse, very dusty and tired after his hot ride from London. He cannot enter and march straight to the lady's bower, not being a real fairy prince, and also because he does not know the bearings of the house, so he rings the doorbell in a commonplace manner, and prosaically inquires "if Mrs. Ross is at home."

Being answered in the affirmative, he says, "Don't announce me; just show me which is the drawing-room—and will you have my horse seen to, please?" The servant indicates the door of the drawing-room, which, as I have said, stood wide open, and the Prince enters and seems amused at perceiving the little Sleeping Beauty under the chandelier, and thinks she is even prettier than when last he saw her, a few months since. He does not remark,

> "Love, if thy tresses be so dark,
> How dark those hidden eyes must be,"

having been well acquainted with the blue

beauty of his cousin Minnie's optics for upwards of twenty years, but he stoops to kiss her, and she wakes with a great start, to exclaim joyfully, "Oh, Lancey, my darling old fellow! how glad I am to see you!"

Her darling old fellow felt justified in bestowing upon her another embrace, and Mrs. Ross continued,

"What ages and ages it is since I've seen you! You nasty boy, not to come here before! How small and thin your face looks! I know you're not well at all now. How are you?"

"As well as this terrifying weather will allow a reasonable mortal to be, thank you, ma belle Hibernienne. And you—you are not looking robust—and Fred, and the babies?"

"Indeed, we're all beautiful—that is, the piccaninnies and I; but Fred is at Aldershott, and I have not heard from him since last night."

"And has he not telegraphed his love and marital inquiries since? Neglectful monster! —But I came down here on speculation, Minnie, thinking you might have a spare room in this eligible villa, and would keep me for a day or two."

"How nice!" cried Mrs. Ross, clapping her hands. "And I'll have you all to myself, and make you better, too—for, indeed, you're looking shocking, Lancey."

"I only want a little quiet, that is all. I am not in the least ill, only rather knocked up. This has been a most racketty season. You were well out of it. The heat is awful. What a pretty place you have here."

"And fancy our having been in it four months, and your never coming near us at all, you shabby, disagreeable old thing! and I don't believe you'd be here now if it wasn't that you have got yourself into mischief. Oh, Lance, I have not seen you looking so nasty, and dissipated, and ill, for years. You have something on your mind. Are you going to be married, or——?"

"Heavens, no! I give you my word nothing is the matter," replied her cousin, with a careless laugh, which failed to thoroughly reassure Mrs. Ross, who looked gravely and quietly at him for a few moments, before she again prattled on.

"Now do tell me all the news. How is everybody? and is London getting empty? and

how many more people are in love with you? and have the parties at Mrs. Burnaby's been as good as ever? By-the-by, Mrs. Burnaby has come to Kingston, and is going to have a great ball on Thursday—to-morrow, that is—in honour of Alfred's twenty-first birthday."

"Ah, yes; she sent me a card. You are going, I suppose?"

"I meant to, if Fred could come for it; but I hate going out alone. However, as you are here, that settles the question."

"You asked me just now for news, Minnie," said her cousin. "Have you seen the *Times* to-day?"

"No; I always trust to Fred's telling me what is going on, and never read more than critiques on plays, and the births, deaths, and marriages; and this morning I was too lazy for even that. Is anything great stirring?"

"It is of the obituary that I speak. Most interesting to us—Kildorin is dead."

"Lance! Then now Kilian——"

"Is the Viscount. Poor fellow! Yes."

"Oh, where can he be? Surely he must turn up *now*. People always do, don't they, when a title or money is waiting for them?"

"There is no knowing. Poor Kilian may be dead, you know—is dead, in all probability; it is ten years since he was lost sight of."

"What did Lord Kildorin die of, and where?" asked Mrs. Ross.

"At Spa. It was some sort of gastric fever, I believe. Poor fellow! one cannot regret him much."

"Oh no. Even setting aside his disgrace and all that, I never really liked him, and I did not much care for his being baby's godfather," said Mrs. Ross. "My recollection of Kilian is of a far nicer fellow."

"Kildorin was not so bad at bottom, I believe," said her cousin, "but always an egregious ass, and fearfully weak; and latterly one rarely saw him perfectly sober."

"Where is poor old Lady Kildorin? I have not heard from home for ever so long."

"She has not returned yet. She went to Spa just soon enough to see her son die. She has been at Kildorin all the summer. Did you know that she has consented at last to sell the town house and furniture?"

"Ah, indeed! Then I suppose things are very bad with them? Kildorin's gambling

debts must drag heavily on his poor mother's jointure."

"Yes; and the property is tied up as firmly as possible for Kilian and his heirs. The present agent is a sensible, clear-headed man, who understands and does his business thoroughly. If the dear old fellow is alive, and reappears, he will find his estate in a far more satisfactory condition than it has been in for generations, I believe."

Whilst conversing, the cousins had sauntered down the garden, which was now beautifully cool and shady, and were sitting under the trees at the river's edge.

"This is an awfully jolly place to be in this blazing weather," remarked Lancelot Chauncey with a languid sigh, as he thought for a moment of the contrast between the life of never-ending, unsatisfying bustle and gaiety he had left for a while, and the still, happy calm and peace of the Rosses' little household, wherein all the machinery of domesticity was so well oiled that it never grated on the ears, or made itself apparent to any other sense. It had been said of Mrs. Ross, in praise of her perfect management of her husband and

children, and thorough, but unobtrusive housewifery, that she washed her dirty linen in the cupboard where her skeleton was kept, and that was situated so secretly and remotely that no one in the world had any more knowledge of the laundry than of the skeleton. Mrs. Ross was one of those cheerily disposed beings who deny that not a single being breathes but has his secret care or anxiety, and was wont to scold and lecture her cousin for taking a rather more dismal and sceptical view of life and human nature than she considered right for a young man endowed so advantageously as Lancelot Chauncey. When I describe him as being well born, handsome, accomplished, an enthusiast on two subjects, namely, his profession and the musical science, and as ever acting up to his standard of what is right and good, I describe one deserving well the title of hero, which is the position he is to occupy in this story. But it must be confessed that his standard of virtue was no higher than a deeply-rooted horror of being ungentlemanly, a dislike of giving pain, or getting into unnecessary debt, and keeping to a friend through rain as well as sunshine, and

that he was in no way superior to a hundred members of his sex, who, like him, favourites in the world, live out their days, only to pass away leaving no mark, to have their places filled up by others, who in their turn also shall sink into space and oblivion.

He was twenty-seven years old, a lieutenant in the Life Guards, and popular in society, both amongst his own sex and with women, many of whom, though it is difficult to describe in what point lay his wonderful power of captivation, had found in him so much of fascination, of danger even, that mothers disliked to see him pay much attention to their youthful, unsophisticated daughters, and qualms of jealousy and anger had more than once been aroused in the breasts of husbands, when Mr. Chauncey's name incessantly completed the list of dinner guests, and wives refused to leave hot, crowded ball-rooms before the final valse with the charming Lifeguardsman had been danced.

His appearance was singularly interesting and attractive. From being slightly—almost too slightly—built, he looked taller than his height of six feet; and the lithe elegance of his slender figure, together with his small

head, refined features, and the absence of any hair on the face, save a small pale moustache, gave him a boyish look which was somewhat at variance with a listless, far-away expression that was habitual to him.

His cousin Minnie, who sincerely loved him, often declared that under his worldly and seemingly selfish exterior Lancelot had many good sterling qualities lying dormant, that it only required some striking circumstance to develop; another Crimean war, for instance, or a great falling in love—the latter idea she would more highly advocate, considering a grand passion necessary for the perfecting of everybody's nature, and knowing that Lancelot had never yet experienced the pleasures or torments of love, though from their childhood he had ever been fondly, though temperately, devoted to herself.

We have digressed since Mr. Chauncey's observation that his cousin's garden was an awfully jolly place in which to dawdle away the blazing summer weather. "Do you find your neighbours a bore?" he continued. "You are nearly as good—bad—as semi-detached."

"The house has been uninhabited until two

weeks ago," replied Mrs. Ross, "and, to say the truth, I have not at all minded the excitement of seeing the furniture arrive, and speculating as to the appearance of the new tenants. It might, perhaps, be tiresome if they wanted to know us; but they have made no effort, and of course I shouldn't call on the ladies without knowing a little about them first."

"Ladies, eh! Respectable spinsters, with parrots and poodles?"

"No, indeed, not at all respectable—very handsome and young, I assure you."

"Fie, fie, Minnie dear!"

"Lancey—rubbish! You know what I mean well enough."

"On my honour, I don't. You said they were not respectable, and upon my being shocked, you fly out," said Lancelot.

"But you perfectly know what I said when I said they were ladies, and you said respectable spinsters, and I said——"

"I said, you said, everybody said! Don't talk so fast, my darling; you are out of breath. Tell me about these young, lovely, *and* respectable ladies."

"Indeed I can't tell you anything at all,

except that they drive in a very beautiful carriage every day, and sing and play most magnificently, and often walk about the garden, and are quite lovely."

"How many—is it a girls' school?"

"Oh no; there are only two of them. I don't think they can be sisters, they are so very different. Oh, besides one is in mourning, and the other out."

"By the soul of the immortal Murray, living in the country has made you a regular little gossip, schöne Minnelein," said Lancelot.

"Well, you began to talk of them, I declare! You're just like a man," cried Mrs. Ross; "they always adore gossip, and pretend they only talk scandal to amuse poor women who can't live without it. There now, I know you are dying to behold my beauties," as Mr. Chauncey, leaning back in the low garden chair, and gazing up at the windows of the next house, began humming the serenade from "Don Giovanni." "You shall come out after dinner and hear them sing. I dare say they will be out in the garden for a little while, as it is so hot; but I'm afraid you won't see them, as there is no moon. When is new moon? Have

you a pocket-book? It is past seven, and the children's bedtime; come in and say good night to them."

"To-morrow will be new moon," said Lancelot Chauncey, consulting his almanac, as he accompanied Mrs. Ross indoors.

CHAPTER II.

"But the youth, because
He had been always with her in the house,
Thought not of Dora."

WHILST Mrs. Ross and her cousin were in the nursery at the front of the house, looking at the three pretty babies in their little beds, the sound of wheels on the drive next door attracted Mr. Chauncey to the window, the brief glance he obtained ere the carriage disappeared under the verandah showing him a bonnet, with a profusion of roses, on the summit of a marvellously be-chignoned, ringleted head, entirely eclipsing the small pale face of the slight, white-robed figure who was the other occupant of the carriage.

Leaving the cousins for a time, I conduct

you, with the above ladies, across a moderately large, square, marble-floored entrance hall, faint with the delicate perfume of exotics, into a drawing-room of almost ecclesiastical appearance, in its subdued purple light and velvet furniture, where she of the roses, sinking into a violet causeuse, studded with golden fleurs-de-lis, exclaims,

"How deliciously cool this room feels! But, Di darling, may that blind be pulled up? You look quite livid."

"Yes, the lilac light, though pleasant, is decidedly unbecoming; but I believe we must dress at once, dear. Johann," the white lady continued, addressing the servant who was drawing up the blinds, "where is Mrs. Deshon?"

"She is in her room, Fräulein."

"And Mr. Deshon—has he come?"

"Yes, Madame, Herr Deshon is now dressing himself."

"Then come, please, Harrie. If dinner is not over soon, you will be feeling too tired and lazy to sing to Gussie, and I am looking forward so much to the state of ecstasy he will be in about you."

The ladies went to their respective apartments, to prepare for the delectation of the above-mentioned "Gussie." Di's toilette was soon completed; and as she took her bracelets from the hands of her attendant, she said,

"I can fasten these, thank you; I wish you would go to Miss Field and ask whether you can help her."

"If you please, Miss Deshon, I'd rather not; it is no pleasure to wait on Miss Field, and she don't care for it, either. She always sends me away—she don't care to let anybody know how many of those long curls and plaits are sham."

"Don't talk nonsense. False hair is the fashion; people think nothing of wearing it nowadays."

"Humph! *You* don't wear any, though, in spite of that French cat who you had before we came to England. But Miss Field, ma'am—Lord! what a mess she makes about, with her violet powder. The carpet——"

"Emma! To whom does this house belong?"

"There, there, Miss Di. I beg your pardon, I'm sure; don't be cross," apologized the maid,

an old and indulged servant, who had waited on Miss Deshon almost from her birth.

"Well, but tell me, if you please, *am* I mistress here?"

"Of course you are."

"Very well, then, I suppose in my own house I have a right to invite any visitors I choose, and whether they spoil my carpets or not is entirely my own concern. Give me a fan, if you please;" and, looking extremely dignified, Miss Deshon sailed downstairs, with her lovely little Greek nose in the air, making the utmost of her five feet four inches.

This was her house, and in name at any rate she was mistress of it, as well as of an estate in Ireland, and an income of £14,000 a year. She entered the violet drawing-room, her gauzy tulle gown so noiselessly grazing the velvet carpet, that the sole occupant of the apartment was not aware of her approach till she touched him on the shoulder with her fan.

"Holà, Di! How d'ye do, dear?"

"So hot—nearly all grizzled up," responded Miss Deshon, presenting her cool ivory cheek for the beautiful yellow moustache of her *fiancé* cousin to rest upon for an instant, whilst she asked,

"How is Ettie?"

"All right. You've been driving, I suppose? Where is mamma?"

"In her room, lying down. She has had one of her bad headaches all day long. I expect she does not know you are here, though, or she would have come downstairs. What time did you arrive?"

"Only an hour ago. I rather like this place, Di, as far as I can tell. The garden looks nice, and I shall enjoy the river. I congratulate Mr. Trollope and you upon your violet 'fixings,' only the room won't light up well at all. However, as we don't want to be here except in the dog days, that is not of much consequence. It's refreshingly cool after London."

"I suppose so," said Miss Deshon rather absently, as she stood looking over some music at the piano, which was placed between the windows. "Gussie, guess who is staying with us. You never will—Miss Field."

"What! Harriette Field? the girl who sings and acts so divinely? How on earth did you pick her up?"

"She was staying with Ettie's friend, Mrs.

Burnaby, in London, and we mutually fell in love, I think, and I asked her to come down here with us. She is charming; I know you will be enchanted with her. We called on Mrs. Burnaby to-day; she is at her house at Kingston. Harrie—hsh—she's coming. Oh no! it is Aunt Maggie. Ma mie, Gussie is here."

Aunt Maggie was a dear, weak-looking, lovely little lady—one of those sweet old things in grey satin and mittens, with soft bands of white hair under a regular *cap*, now almost extinct. Not that Mrs. Deshon could be called an old woman, or looked more than her sixty years. Her cheeks were almost as smooth and fair as those of her niece, and her dark eyes shone as brightly now as when, thirty years ago, her husband had committed the wisest act of his life in marrying her.

Gussie rose to greet the elder lady with more animation of manner than he had manifested towards the younger, and inquired after the headache, which Mrs. Deshon had scarcely finished assuring them was quite well, before the door opened to admit Miss Field and her widely-spreading skirts.

She was a very fine woman, certainly, and looked well in her somewhat extravagant dinner dress. She was tall, and had a splendid, full figure, lovely blue eyes, and brown hair very elaborately arranged. Her features were regular, and the upper part of her face undeniably handsome; but the length of chin, massiveness of the jaw, and the thin, compressed lips, were so deteriorating to her beauty, that many, even whilst confessing her immense power of fascination, considered her almost a plain woman.

But Mr. Gussie Deshon was not one of these people. He had frequently seen Miss Field in society, where she was most useful as an amateur actress and musician, and had admired her extremely. Miss Field was acquainted with him merely by repute, as the affianced husband of her new friend, and the ceremony of introduction was performed between them by Miss Deshon before they went into dinner.

"So you really have been curious to see me, and would have been disappointed if I had not come?"

"Yes, indeed, Mr. Deshon," replied Miss

Field, as they sauntered down the garden some two hours later. "Naturally, I was most anxious to see and know one to whom my darling little Diane's love is given." Her voice was low and measured, and the white lids drooped over her lovely eyes, for she was really very sleepy, and one of the wildering glances with which she so admirably understood the way to enchant her victims would have been wasted in the darkness; but the magic of a voice alone has sometimes proved to equal, or even distance, the utmost eloquence that features can express.

"Setting Di aside," said Gussie, "now that we have met, could you feel any interest in me? —do you think you will like me?—may we be *friends?*"

"I hope so, Mr. Deshon, for Di's sake."

"Oh, for pity's sake, let her alone! Do let me enjoy your society without having the memory of my thraldom to weigh me down. Ah! I fear you think me a brute; but indeed, Miss Field, our engagement was put upon us—was not of our own choosing; and you cannot expect me to play the fool by pretending to worship Di's very shoe lace, more especially to

one like yourself, towards whom I felt irresistibly drawn the first instant you spoke to me."

Perhaps Miss Field also felt drawn towards him, for she allowed him to draw her hand through his arm, and to keep that hand in his own. Gussie went on,

"Can you not believe how truly blessed it is for me to find here a congenial companion like yourself—one whose ideas coincide so thoroughly with my own? Do you not feel that there is a sympathy between us?"

"I should like you to look on me as a sincere friend, dear Mr. Deshon," answered the lady, withdrawing her fingers from Gussie's tender clasp, as she perceived Mrs. Deshon beckoning them from the window.

Harriette Field was a pleasant woman with whom to play at love-making: she knew so well the way to use her large blue eyes, and modulate the tone of her voice, or assume an artistic, statuesque pose, whilst she appreciatingly listened to imbecile rhapsodies of admiration. Gussie thought to himself, as they went back to the drawing-room, that she was "deuced nice," and that he would

have great fun as long as they remained under the same roof. The lady's thoughts were, "This is a great fool, and awfully conceited; I should like to make him desperately in love with me—and I will."

They had tea then, but there was no music that evening, for Gussie and Miss Field appeared far too much engrossed in looking over photographs at a small table in the corner of the room, for any other amusement to be suggested.

Miss Deshon read the *Pall Mall Gazette*, every now and then imparting a bit of news to her aunt, who sat by her, knitting gay socks for Mr. Gussie. Harriette leaned her white arm upon the table, and, with her chin hidden in her hand, disguised her yawns—she was so dreadfully sleepy—and Gussie became less languid, and rather more inane, as his admiration of his beautiful companion deepened.

"What was the name of that man we used to see at Baden year after year—a dissipated English nobleman, that Gussie said was for ever at the tables?" inquired Miss Deshon, looking up from the paper, with her finger marking a notice in the obituary. "Was it not Lord Kildorin?"

"Kildorin! I think it was—an Irish title. Is he married?" Mrs. Deshon asked.

"No; a Viscount Kildorin has died at Spa, aged thirty-five. I suppose it must be he," was the reply.

"Confound it! One of the most tantalizingly fascinating things about you is the way in which you suddenly become utterly distraite and in the clouds!" said Gussie, rather piqued that a piece of his eloquence, twice repeated, had fallen on deaf ears. Harriette laughed: hers was at all times rather a forced, smileless laughter, short and low, with nothing of merriment about it; she apologized for her absent manner, complaining of the heat of the room.

"Then 'Come into the garden, Maud, to the flowers and be their sun.' Do, please, come," said Gussie; "you look so very pale."

She murmured something to the effect of its being "so unsociable to leave the others," but nevertheless went with him down to the river.

Mrs. Ross and Mr. Chauncey were sitting under the willows in the adjoining garden. Whispered Minnie,

"Why, there's a man! Now, I wonder *who* he is. I never saw anybody but the two girls

before. Oh, Lance, I'm afraid they are lovers. I'll cough, I declare I will."

"Be quiet! let us enjoy the fun. He has her hand. By Jove! the maid is coy. No, she doesn't mind it; she has given it him again. Oh, come in, Minnie; other people spooning is a coarse, stupid sight. Here is an old woman coming to play marplot," said Lancelot Chauncey.

Poor little Mrs. Deshon, who always endeavoured to nip her son's flirtations in the bud, considering them in sadly bad taste and insulting to her niece, whom she loved equally as much as her own children, had approached, with an injunction to Harriette not to catch cold.

"I will follow your advice, and come in, dear Mrs. Deshon; I am tired too—we had such a long drive this afternoon. If you will excuse me, I think I will go to bed," said Miss Field demurely.

The ladies all retired, leaving Gussie in the garden, smoking a cigar, and meditating very much upon the charms of Miss Harriette Field.

She had taken his fancy unusually, and,

although always susceptible, he was now more fascinated than was his wont. "Hang it!" he thought to himself, "I can't make the girl out a bit. I wonder what made her turn off cross, and go in, when mamma told her?"

As he mused, "the girl" had returned to the drawing-room, perceiving which, he quickly threw away his cigar, and hurried to join her.

Her lips were set and compressed, and she was very pale, as she moved about the room, more like an animated statue than a woman; but a hot flush mounted to her face when she saw Gussie.

"Ah! Mr. Deshon, I did not think any one was here. I came down to find something to read, as I am not feeling inclined to sleep just yet."

"Don't go to bed, then. Stop with me; it would be most merciful of you to bear me company a little longer, and it is quite early."

"Oh" (shocked), "I cannot stay. Here is the *Cornhill*, and may I take the *Pall Mall?* The news is very dull, but still one must read it. *Please* give me my candle, Mr. Deshon, and let me go; I am so tired."

He could not now think that she had "turned

off cross," for she threw a more tender, liquid expression into her great blue eyes than she had yet treated him to, and laid a white hand softly on his arm.

"You said just now that you could not sleep, Miss Field; and now you won't stop and say two words to a poor fellow, because you are *so tired.* I am afraid you tell fibs, Mademoiselle, so I shall punish you by not letting you leave me till you beg pardon, confess that you are very naughty, and promise to behave better for the future."

Miss Deshon's maid here came into the room for a book her mistress wanted. She sniffed contemptuously to herself as she retired, and Miss Field seized her candlestick from Gussie.

"Good-night, Mr. Deshon; it is very dreadful of us to be chattering here at this time. Emma looked quite shocked."

"Confound her! surely there can be no harm in two friends enjoying a moment's peaceful talk? Did we not decide that there is something in unison in our natures? Are you not going to be a great friend to me, Harrie?"

"If *you* can possibly require and care for *my*

friendship," was the reply, tenderly spoken, as Gussie kissed the beautiful hand he held prisoner.

"Now I must do a bit of charming innocence, and save my character," said Harriette to herself as she went upstairs, pausing to knock at the door of Miss Deshon's room.

"Come in," answered a sweet, gentle little voice, and she entered.

Her weary, unquiet, hard face was a strong contrast to the calm, peaceful sight that Diane presented, as she lay on a couch by the window, reading. There, in her white gown, with her dark hair brushed off her temples, she looked so pure and young, that the other could scarcely restrain a sigh as the difference between them struck her.

Diane's was a face which could not fail to be noticed everywhere; but the excessive beauty of its small, regular features was less remarkable than the childlike delicacy of complexion and expression, and the perfect grace of all her movements. She was a very small woman: not especially short, but such a tinily made, frail looking little creature, with such a small head and face, such fairy hands and feet, that a Juno

or a Hebe might have condemned her, being colourless and insignificant. So much accustomed was she to yield her own will to that of others, so quiet and as a rule reserved were her manners, that a spirited, gushing enthusiast might, on merely a slight acquaintance, have decided her to be wanting in energy and character.

Her nature, like her beauty, was calm and unruffled; life with her was so cloudless and placid, although it had been by no means a sluggish, uneventful existence, for from her babyhood she had travelled immensely, and during her father's lifetime had visited and mixed in the society of almost every capital in Europe.

Yet she had

> "But fed on the roses
> And lain in the lilies of life."

She had known no great sorrow or trouble; she had steered her course for twenty-two years along a quiet, passionless stream—her soul had never been awakened; something as yet was wanting for the ripening and completing of her nature.

"Reading German poetry, you clever little

Diane!" Miss Field said, as she took her place in an easy chair by her friend's side.

"I was trying to find the original of a translation from Goethe that I sing," said Diane, closing her book. "I hoped you would come and talk to me, for Emma said you were not undressed. But are you not tired, dear Harrie? You are so pale."

"It's the heat—I am not really tired. I thought it would be impossible to go to sleep just yet, for it is not late, and so went downstairs to fetch something to read; but as you are not in bed, may I stay with you a little while? I want to be very inquisitive, darling, and ask all sorts of questions about Mr. Deshon. How good-looking he is!"

"Yes—I admire Gussie very much. Perhaps he is hardly tall enough; my other cousin, his sister, is so much taller in proportion, that it is almost a pity they cannot change places with each other," said Diane musingly; then with a merry, light laugh, "Harrie, do tell me—in all your life, did you ever meet with more uninteresting, cool lovers than Gussie and I?"

"Why, certainly you are not demonstrative;

but I don't see that you are uninteresting, because you know how to behave in company. I detest public spooning."

"Nobody ever guesses we are engaged. I remember one winter at Pau, when first I was grown up, I was told that people talked a little about us; but that was long before our marriage was thought of."

"How long have you been engaged?"

"A year. When I came of age, papa said he thought it would be a good thing for the money that we should marry, because, you see, of course all mamma's fortune was obliged to come to me, and Gussie would be much better off if he married me and had everything, instead of only having the third of papa's money, like Margaretta had when she married."

"Then at present, if I understand, Mr. Deshon has no money at all?"

"Oh, he can have whatever he wants from me, you know; my solicitor manages all about it. He had an allowance whilst papa was alive—he was so fond of him, and of Margaretta also; I believe he liked them better than me."

"But, darling Di, supposing one of these

days you were to discover that you liked someone else better than Mr. Deshon?"

"That is not likely. We are to be married in about six months' time, and I don't know anybody intimately enough to fall in love, and —you, who are so very much admired, and have crowds of lovers, will perhaps pity such a maiden all forlorn. No man has ever flirted with me even, much less fallen in love."

"Di! That is sheer nonsense—you, who have mixed so much in foreign society!"

Diane laughed. "It was very ridiculous, of course; but because some relations of my mother's were of good old French families, papa and aunt Maggie, and my dear old cousin Aglaïe, who was with us a great deal, took it into their heads that I must not dance at balls with promiscuous Englishmen, or any foreigner who was not noble. So I hardly ever knew a creature, and had to look on whilst Margaretta (who always does exactly as she chooses) danced and enjoyed herself, feeling dreadfully dull and cross. Then, soon after Margaretta's marriage, papa's health became so bad, that we lived very quietly, and hardly ever went out, or saw any company at all."

"Ah, sweet one, what a fortunate man is your Gussie to possess your young, untrifled-with, little affectionate heart! Enviable man!"

"Dear Harrie, don't give us credit for there being one atom of sentiment between us. Gussie and I are, of course, very fond of each other—I hope so—and we are engaged, because we were told to be; but as to being in love, why, we are neither of us capable of it. He is too great a flirt. I——"

"You, my pet?"

"I don't know—only I shouldn't care a bit if somebody ordered me to-morrow not to marry Gussie. I should be quite as happy."

"But it would be a bad thing for him."

"No, it has all been arranged properly by papa. If we were to become very tired of our contract, Gussie would take half my present income for his own, that is to say, all the money that belonged to papa, for, by the time Ettie was portioned, my two parents' fortune amounted to exactly the same sum. Castle Deshon, by the way, will be mine in any case, whether we marry each other or no."

"Whether we marry each other or no!"

Having discovered everything she had much wished to learn concerning her friend, and more especially her friend's pecuniary affairs, and, mentally praising herself for having drawn Diane into such confidential talk, Miss Field allowed the conversation to drift into indifferent topics, and, as soon as she could do so, affectionately bade her good night, and departed with her book and newspaper.

Miss Deshon read Goethe till she was sleepy, and then went to bed, drowsily wondering at the Gretchen's extravagant rhapsodies on her lover and his kiss.

> "A heart that never plighted troth,
> But stagnates in the weeds of sloth."

The Laureate well describes the kind of heart that at this time was beating so peacefully in Diane's breast.

The maid was waiting in the adjoining room to assist Miss Field in undressing; but she immediately dismissed her, and, when alone, stood for some minutes staring at her reflection in the tall looking-glass.

"Yes," she mused, "I *am* very handsome, and I don't look older than I did ten years ago,

but I look my age, *quite*, and soon, I suppose, I shall alter—perhaps grow too fat. Harrie! make your book; your sunshiny time is *now*, therefore make hay! I will say my prayers to-night—I shall enjoy them. Yes—fool—go thinking and dawdling, and be stupid and hideous to-morrow from want of sleep. Excitement! I never thought to feel excited again: this won't do," and she opened her dressing-case, and taking from thence a little phial of laudanum, put it to her lips.

Her prayers were quickly repeated, and she was partially undressed and sitting before the toilette table with the *Pall Mall Gazette* for perusal, but it was only a few lines that she could read, for the thought forced itself between her eyes and the print, "Shall I have Gussie Deshon and half Diane's money, I wonder? I will not quarrel with Fate, if that is what is written for me."

At length her excitement was conquered by the strong opiate she had taken, and she fell into a heavy slumber in her chair, waking a few hours afterwards, to find the sunshine streaming through the blinds, the candles burned down in their sockets, and the pages of

the newspaper lying all scattered at her feet, save one leaf, which her hands grasped tightly, that one containing the single sentence she had read.

CHAPTER III.

"In gloss of satin, and shimmer of pearl,
Queen Lily and Rose in one."

THE ball-room of Mrs. Burnaby's house at Kingston was sufficiently but not over crowded, when the Rosses and Lancelot Chauncey entered it at about eleven o'clock the following evening.

Handsome, gentlemanly Fred Ross, who had obtained a month's leave of absence, to the intense delight of his wife, was a great acquisition at a party; one of those delightful creatures who, in addition to being in themselves a pleasure to look at and to speak to, possess the tact and virtue of always being at hand when important dowagers require to be escorted to their carriages, ever ready to dance

with waltz-lovers, or detain a weary chaperone, on the brink of departure, in agreeable conversation, in order that her charges might escape for a final valse.

On the present occasion, however, everything was proceeding so very satisfactorily, that, instead of instantly seizing hold of him and making him useful, the hostess kept him by her side, conversing with him herself, whilst Mrs. Ross and Lancelot joined the dancers. Mrs. Burnaby and Colonel Ross were old friends, and it was at her house in London that he had first met his wife, so that there was a kind of sentimental feeling always about her really very pleasant parties with the young husband.

"I am so glad Minnie likes Teddington," said Mrs. Burnaby, upon whose recommendation he had taken the riverside cottage.

"It is a charming place," said Colonel Ross. "I should like to buy it, only it's not worth while when I can so seldom be there."

"No; I suppose not, and Minnie, of course, would not care to go there often without you. Have you seen anything of your neighbours?"

"Minnie has, I believe; that is to say, she

talks a good deal about their beautiful music, and occasionally of their gorgeous dresses."

"Ah, yes, to be sure! Miss Field. Harriette Field is staying there. She dresses so splendidly. You know her?"

"Only by name. She is rather a celebrity, especially at Dover."

"She is much admired. Look at her, sitting over there, in pink tulle. Oh, how desperately that young Mr. Deshon flirts with her! I should think his—— What is this dance?—a valse. I must find you a partner. By the way, you have not called me Mrs. Leo Hunter to-night, so, as a reward—and it is a *very* great one, you will own—I will present you to my newest lion. Alfred," as her son passed them with Diane upon his arm, "you are not to monopolize Miss Deshon all the evening. Go away now and leave her to me."

Alfred, a handsome Woolwich cadet of twenty-one, content with the knowledge that her name was upon his card for three more dances, with a smile and bow to the heiress, obeyed his mother.

"Are you disengaged for this valse, dear?" asked Mrs. Burnaby. "Yes——? Colonel

Ross, Miss Deshon," and then Fred offered his arm to Diane, when, as the band struck up, he suddenly stammered out, "I am engaged for this. I beg your pardon. May I have the pleasure of the next? Oh, thank you," and scribbling a hieroglyphic on her card, he hurried off, leaving her by Mrs. Burnaby's side.

"How dreadfully stupid men are about their engagements at a dance, to be sure," said Mrs. Burnaby, a little annoyed at her "lion" being left partnerless. "You would like to dance, I dare say, Miss Deshon. I must find——" and she glided away in search of a partner; but a fitting one not being available, and her hostess not returning, Diane discovered a sofa amidst a grove of india-rubber trees and acacias, close outside the room, where she established herself and watched the dancing.

It was so that she was first seen by Lancelot Chauncey, as he crossed the hall at the end of the valse, with a lady whom he was escorting to refreshment.

A slanted mirror above her head reflected the lights from various candelabra, lending a stronger brilliancy to the jewelled crescent upon her coronet of hair, and the sweet grey

eyes which were looking up at young Burnaby, by whom she had just been joined, his fair healthy Saxon face beaming with delight and his honest calf-love for the exquisitely lovely girl.

"That little thing is like a face on a cameo, her profile is perfect. Who is she?" said Lancelot's partner.

"'The Princess of Trebizond,' or a child of Nawab Nazim, I should think, with all those jewels. What splendid opals!" replied Mr. Chauncey.

"You must fortify yourself for the next dance with an ice, Miss Deshon. Oh, it is only a quadrille, but won't you have one all the same?" said Alfred Burnaby.

Diane assented, adding, "I wonder if the gentleman who has engaged me for this dance will run away from me again, as he did last time."

Lancelot, the Rosses, and Gussie Deshon with Miss Field, were all at one end of the refreshment room when Diane entered. Alfred, after placing his charge close to her friends, left her in order to procure the ice "which tired nature demanded," as he said.

"How are you enjoying yourself, dear one?" asked Harriette Field caressingly.

"Oh, will you dance one round with me, or are you engaged for all night?" said her cousin, taking her card. "Burnaby, Burnaby, Burnaby? do you mean to dance everything with that boy?"

"I am going to dance with that handsome, sunburnt man next time—at least I suppose so," replied Diane lowering her voice, and giving her head a little backward jerk to indicate Colonel Ross. "But he was rather funny, and first asked me for the last one, and remembered suddenly that he was engaged for it."

"*Doesn't* she look sweet?" irrelevantly asked Harriette.

"Ye-es, very well turned out of hand. I congratulate you, Di. Why, you're out of mourning, are you not?" said Gussie.

"No, only I couldn't resist my opals. Emma tempted me by opening all the cases, and displaying them, just as I was putting on jet ornaments."

"Will you let me fetch you another ice, or shall we go back to the drawing-room?" said Alfred Burnaby.

"Excuse me, Alfred," said Colonel Ross, who had been standing quite close to Diane for the last few minutes, "I have the honour of being able to produce Miss Deshon's promise to dance this quadrille with me."

"He has scratched you down as 'Mahomet'!" with a burst of fresh boyish laughter, as he looked over Fred's shoulder at his card.

"My poor, dear little crescent! It is too bad of him to imply that it is conspicuous!" said Diane in a semi-injured tone.

"By Mecca and Medina, it is the prettiest thing in the room, and *yours* is the only nice head!" ejaculated Alfred, boy-like, fond of sweeping assertions.

"Merci," said Fred. "Then when next I hear of your telling Mrs. Ross her head is like the Clyte's, I shall tell her you are a humbug. Please will you come, Miss Deshon?"

"Mr. Burnaby tells me that Mrs. Ross is the prettiest woman he has ever seen, and my neighbour," said Diane, as she took Fred's arm. "Can you show her to me?"

"Are you the nightingale my wife raves about? Why, how very funny!"

"Your wife! Are you?—I beg your

pardon; I did not hear your name when Mrs. Burnaby said it. But will you please point out Mrs. Ross when you see her?"

"I will, certainly. Is there any one you wish for as our *vis à vis?* It is Lancers," as "The Original" struck up. "Shall we stand here? Lance, may I come, please?"

They completed the eight in a set, which contained Minnie and Lancelot, a lady whose *prononcé* attire and blazing jewellery qualified her for the position of Lady Mayoress, at least, and of whom the dazzling complexion was less the gift of generous nature than owing to the accomplishments of the immortal Rachel. Young Alfred Burnaby was the partner of this very brilliant being, and Gussie and Harriette were the other couple.

"There is my darling wife, to your left," said Colonel Ross, indicating the painted belle. "Am I not a lucky man? Is she not magnificent? I quite idolize her—Darling!"

"She has a devoted admirer in Mr. Burnaby," replied Diane, not knowing what to say, and feeling dreadfully disappointed at the bad taste this "nice pleasant man," as she mentally styled him, manifested, both as regarded his

choice of a wife and his eulogiums to an utter stranger. She did not say anything more till the close of the figure, when she asked her partner if he knew Minnie's name. "I have been admiring her so much," she said.

"Oh! That's Miss O'Grady. Yes, she's a lively little Irish girl. The man she is dancing with is her cousin, Lancelot Chauncey. Would you like to dance with him? My wife says he is the best valser in the world."

"I have not valsed, nor, indeed, danced at all, for more than two years, and I am pining for it," said Diane pathetically. "Do you know, when you deserted me, I felt so much disappointed, though I had been dancing with Mr. Burnaby, whose step is very good; but I have not *valsed* yet this evening with anybody."

"I beg your pardon. I fear I behaved most rudely to you just now, but don't think me a complete ass. There is a sentiment about that 'Guard's Valse,' and I never dance it except with one person."

It had been when Godfrey's *chef-d'œuvre* was in the infancy of its fame, at a Dublin Castle ball, that Miss Minnie O'Grady owned to Lieutenant Fred that her heart's beatings coin-

cided entirely with his own, and the valse was played two or three times during the evening, with an accompaniment of expressions and vows of eternal adoration and fidelity, and both had agreed subsequently that it was impossible for them ever to dance to that air with any save each other.

"You danced with Miss O'Grady, at least I saw her with you eating ices, after the valse was over," said Diane.

"Precisely. I did dance 'The Guards Valse' with Miss O'Grady, and I never have danced to that music with another woman, and I never will."

"Suppose your wife asked you to dance it with her, would you then refuse to do so?" Diane could not help asking.

"I do not like 'supposing,' Miss Deshon. We have had enough of this subject—let us talk of something else."

"Like 'The Hatter and Alice!'" laughed Diane.

The quadrille was ended, and many of the company were going in to supper. Fred with his partner followed the stream to the dining-room, where Diane was soon surrounded by

men to whom she had been introduced, all eager to be noticed by and attend on the beautiful heiress.

She was in full enjoyment of ruling her little court—(innocent pleasure; why are people ashamed to own how much delight they feel in their power of attracting admiration? Surely it should be considered as a sort of proper self-pride, that art of fascinating)—when she discovered that Gussie and Harriette—incessantly together—were close to her, and some one was saying in a low, somewhat plaintive voice, "*Will* you present me?" and Diane felt her arm touched by the soft feathers of her friend's fan, and Harrie was saying,

"Di, darling. Mr. Chauncey, Miss Deshon."

A little misunderstanding and discussion between Diane and her attendants had been interrupted by this introduction. Alfred had been accepted for the following dance, but subsequently had found that some other lady was engaged to him for it, and Diane could not decide which of her partners had most claim to be appointed for the valse, *vice* Alfred, exchanged. Lancelot's "May I have the favour of this dance?" (affecting not to be aware of

what was going on) decided the matter; and, with a bow and smile to her hovering train, she surrendered to the invader, or, in other words, took Mr. Chauncey's arm and repaired to the dancing room.

"The last scandal in high life—Miss Deshon has eloped with your fascinating cousin, having previously flirted disgracefully with your husband," said Alfred Burnaby to Mrs. Ross.

"I saw her with Fred," cried Minnie, "but I am too much accustomed to having my feelings wrung, to be utterly broken-hearted. I want to be introduced to your charmer, please, Alfred—not for any Eleanor and Fair Rosamond reason, but because she is the prettiest girl I have ever seen."

From his manner, it would seem that it was a like case with Mr. Chauncey; but he had a habit of appearing deeply struck with admiration for nearly every woman he spoke to, and it did not strike Minnie, who was not dancing that valse, that her cousin's demeanour was more than ordinarily devotional.

And, indeed, Lancelot experienced no unusual sensation as he bore Diane off and

whirled her round the room. He was accustomed to secure the most attractive partner present, and from the moment he first remarked her, and noted how superior she was in beauty and style to most women, he had decided that he must dance with her, and—if she did not disappoint his expectations—amuse himself with talking nonsense during the remainder of the evening to the belle of the room. He had met Miss Field a few times, and was sufficiently well acquainted with her to ask her to dance, as he had done, on discovering that she could make him known to the girl who had attracted his notice and admiration.

"Are you fond of going to balls?" were Lancelot's first words to Diane, spoken in the half endearing, patronizing voice with which one would ask a child if it liked bonbons or pantomimes. He did not think she was quite grown up, and Diane replied somewhat like a child.

"Ah! I think balls are lovely, and I am ever so happy to-night! I have not valsed for two years. I wish one did not get tired, and could dance on for hour after hour!"

"If I might be your partner, it is needless

to say that I wish so too. If we could float away into eternity with one whom——"

But flirtations, though doubtless infinitely entrancing and pleasant to the persons concerned, are not equally delightful when repeated, and written with ink and paper are simply mawkish and twaddling to the last degree. How unspeakably stupid it is to listen to a flirtation when unemployed in a like manner!—it is not tantalizing in my mind, although I have heard such a thing compared to seeing other people at a banquet partaking of some rare delicacy, of which there is not a sufficient quantity to go all round the table, and is finished before it is your turn to be helped. I think, in witnessing others' flirtation, one only feels a supreme contempt and wonderment as to how people can be so silly and so lost to all sense of dignity, oblivious of the fact that one was yesterday, and would like to be again to-morrow, to the full as ridiculous as those one is mentally censuring.

So I draw a veil over Mr. Chauncey's gallantry, which, however, soon broke down before the childlike *insouciance* of Diane's

manner; which, though savouring not the least of bread-and-butter, led her partner to imagine her to be a well-educated, fresh little girl, newly emerged from a succession of foreign boarding-schools.

"Don't you think Miss Field is very lovely?" inquired Diane, as they walked round the room after the valse. Gussie and Harriette were a topic of chaff throughout the company, for they had been inseparable the whole evening.

"No, I don't admire her a bit," was the reply. Lancelot was not one of those men who make a point of never praising, or even acknowledging, the beauty of one woman to another, but it was his wont to be candid when he really liked people, and he did like Diane, and was conscious of a hope that intimacy with Miss Field (whom he disliked) would not contaminate the simple, unsophisticated nature of the "lovely child."

"Oh! Every one else that I have danced with is perfectly enraptured with her."

"'Every one else' being Alfred Burnaby and Colonel Ross, I believe?"

"Indeed, I have danced every dance but

one, and I have been introduced to five, six partners before you. You are my seventh."

"Seven—the number of perfection. I take that as a favourable omen that you approve of me, and will allow me to ask for some more most delightful valses with you. Give me your card; it is quite full, I'm afraid. Burnaby, Burnaby, A. B., Alfred—oh, you cruel little beauty! why do you turn that poor boy's head so?"

"Sir!"

"Pardon—forgive me. Moths enjoy the flame that kills them, I know. I see you are going to dance with Fred Ross again; this smudge is his, I think. Have you seen his wife? Yes; you were dancing in the same set, to be sure. What do you think of her? I wish you knew her."

"She is not the style of person I admire at all," said Diane. "Do you think her handsome?"

"I object to disagree with you, but I am sorry to say I consider her sweetly pretty."

"A Rowland for an Oliver! You would not admire my friend Miss Field."

"Excuse me, I own that Miss Field is very

handsome, and extremely clever. She is a most fascinating woman. Do you know who that fellow is who has dangled about after her all night?"

"Oh yes. He is my cousin."

"I know him very well by sight. What is he?"

"Do you mean what profession?—Nothing. He goes out a great deal in London; he has been much more in England than I have. I wonder whether you have ever met my other cousin, Gussie's sister, Lady Cockburn?"

"Of Grosvenor Street, wife of the member for ——? To be sure I have. I visit at her house. So *she* is your cousin! And *you* —though it is a libel on your beauty—*you* are meant to be represented in that picture of Seymour's in Lady Cockburn's drawing-room, which is so insanely called 'Minna and Brenda'?"

"Yes; but people generally think that such a nice picture. It was in the Paris Exposition. The artist was very much in love with Margaretta, and I dare say took more pains over her portrait than mine. She was exactly like that picture then, but I don't think her a

quarter so pretty now. She used always to go to *bals costumés* as 'Morning,' or something of that sort, because of her yellow hair; and once I went as 'Night,' when Mr. Seymour was present—and you know Claud Halcro, in 'The Pirate,' calls Minna and Brenda 'Night and Day.' I excuse the title of the picture, you see."

"But I can't bear you to be compared to that stilted, high-flown, ill-tempered heroine; and besides, one thinks of owls and bats and gloominess in connection with night—not of beautiful ladies like——"

"Fairies only appeared by night, and night is very nice, I think. Stars and moons shine in the night, and I adore the moon. My name is the moon's, too!"

"Ah! *I* also adore the moon: I forgot her. She has not been shining lately, has she, '*Miss Moon*'?"

"I am called Diana—that is, Diane."

"'Queen and huntress, chaste and fair!'

as Ben Jonson, Esquire, styles her. You are a queen, one can see and feel. Do you hunt?"

"No; but I ride. Do you?"

"I am in the Life Guards," said Lancelot Chauncey.

They had danced three consecutive times, and now people were forming a set of quadrilles.

"Don't dance this, please," said Lancelot. "Let me introduce you to my cousin, Mrs. Ross; even if you don't admire her, you are certain to like her."

"Is Mrs. Ross your cousin? Then she must be a relation of that pretty girl you were dancing with when I first saw you. I was opposite you, with Colonel Ross, in the Lancers; Miss O'Grady, he told me, was her name, and Mrs. Ross was dancing with Mr. Burnaby."

"Aha! So Fred was pleased to treat you to some of his light badinage, was he? Imagine that macaw being his wife! How I will make her laugh! Minnie," continued Mr. Chauncey, as he led Diane to a sofa where Mrs. Ross and her husband were together, flirting like two lovers, "divorce Fred on the spot; he has been palming off that creature in salmon colour and blue to Miss Deshon as *you!*"

"And saying he was devoted to her, and wanting me to admire her, and calling *you* 'a

lively little thing,' Mrs. Ross," cried Diane, putting her hand in Minnie's. "Oh, what a shame to take me in so wickedly!"

"He never told me of his villainy," said Minnie; "but I am so flattered indeed at his calling such a magnificent being *me*, that I can't scold him at all. Why, that lady is some Jewish heiress—she is ever so rich!"

"Richer than me?" Diane said, and then, feeling she had thoughtlessly spoken in somewhat bad taste, became confused, and was glad that one of her partners here approached, with upbraidings for her having bestowed the dance that should have been his upon Lancelot, and a request for her hand in the quadrille.

But that being over, she asked to be taken back to Mrs. Ross; and excusing herself from an engagement to Alfred Burnaby, who hovered disappointedly near her, she sat down by Minnie's side and laid the foundation-stone of that sweet woman-friendship which was to last throughout their lives.

When Lancelot took leave of Diane, with some elegant-sounding, well-rounded rhodomontade about moonlight merging into dawn, and the carriage drove away from Mrs. Bur-

naby's door, she was in the state of excited happiness that is only experienced when one is very young, or innocent-minded and simple.

Gussie and Harriette flirted away as though oblivious of her presence, as she almost was of theirs. Until they were within a mile of her house she did not speak a word; then hearing from Gussie,

"Twelve of Piver's six buttons, to the finest cigar-case you ever embroidered—is it?" she said,

"Gussie betting as usual? Don't put any faith in him, Harrie; he never pays."

"*Méchant!* And I am sure to win, Mr. Lazy. The naughty little boy vows we shall lie in bed all to-morrow, Di, and the bet is that I will be downstairs before nine o'clock, ready to ride with him."

"I feel so fresh and wide awake now, that I expect I shall want to sleep very late to-morrow—at least, to-day," said Diane.

"Oh, but you'll have to get up—that is, if I do lose my bet to Miss Field, which I don't expect to do," said Gussie, calmly.

"Yes, darling, we must victimize you, I fear, on account of Mrs. Grundy."

Harriette meant Mrs. Deshon, and only prevented herself from saying her name just in time. She did not care for Gussie in the least, and knew that the game she was playing was a difficult one, in which she might sicken and collapse, although the prize to be attained was worth patience and a struggle. That the young man was vapid and soulless, lacking character and energy sufficient to feel himself really in love with her, she believed to be the greatest difficulty with which she had to contend. Diane she never took into consideration in the light of an obstacle; Mrs. Deshon she utterly despised. Her work was harder than might appear, but Harriette braced herself heroically for the task, and it was really in high spirits that she kissed Diane when they parted at her bedroom door, recapitulating the terms of her wager with Gussie.

CHAPTER IV.

"She looked so lovely as she swayed
The rein with dainty finger tips—
A man had given all other bliss,
And all his worldly wealth for this,
To waste his whole heart in a kiss
Upon her perfect lips."

Poor Harriette would not have felt sorry if, on waking up, she had discovered that the time they had appointed for meeting was long past, and she might go to sleep again and rest her tired limbs and aching head.

But the maid knocked at her door at eight o'clock, disturbing her from her heavy exhausted slumber with the intelligence that "Mr. Deshon desired his compliments, and would be downstairs in a quarter of an hour."

She started up (she had but partially undressed), and was ready in a few moments.

Hers was not the sort of beauty that depends

on health or animation, and she was well skilled in many artistic devices of the toilette, so that she really looked very handsome when attired in her riding-habit—that most becoming of all costumes to a Juno-like form such as hers.

Diane, who had brushed her hair, and said her prayers, and lain down cool, refreshed, and tidily in her bed, like a well-regulated little Christian, looked very pale and sleepy when the trio were mounted and trotting away in the direction of Bushey Park ; but she was blessed with the most sweet, even temper imaginable, and was far too well accustomed to yield to Gussie's whims to make the least complaint of fatigue, though she did ask of her cousin,

"How in the world did you make up your mind to wake so early ? I should have thought you would have liked Harrie to lose her bet with you, and you made her win by sending word to her to get up."

"She wouldn't have worked me a cigar-case if I had not been up in time, even if she herself had succumbed to Morpheus," was the reply. "Besides, I have not been to bed at all. I had a pipe, and read several chapters of 'L'Homme qui rit,' and then a bath, and—me voilà."

"And isn't this a far more healthy plan than lying in a stuffy bed at this time of day?" cried Harriette, with splendidly assumed energy.

"To be sure! I feel as fresh as a lark. I am so glad you were awake. Early morning is so stunning in the dog-days."

"Bravado—because you have lost your bet, sir," Diane said with a yawn.

"Oh! poor little one!" exclaimed Miss Field, "she is so sleepy. How selfish we are, Mr. Deshon, to have dragged her out. I feel such a wretch, and I shall hate wearing your gloves; they'll all split, and have defective thumbs, as a judgment on my cruelty."

"You're not tired, Di, are you?" inquired her tender *fiancé*, his tone implying that her fatigue was a matter of slight consideration. "Here are the Park gates. Let us race to the Diana fountain—once, twice, three times, off!" They had cantered about twenty yards down the avenue, when Diane, who was some little way in advance, let fall her whip. She stopped, and calling to them as they passed her not to wait, jumped from her horse, thinking to be able to remount, after she had recovered her riding-whip, and overtake the

others. Gussie and Miss Field arrived together at the fountain, where they paused to gaze at the gold and silver fish disporting themselves in the water. Innocent and interesting amusement enough it would seem, and somewhat engrossing withal, as they were quite forgetful of the fact that Diane was a long way behind, waiting their return, and utterly unconscious of the proximity of a tall, slim gentleman, who emerged from the shadow of the chestnut avenue, and was watching them.

"Deshon and that woman!" said Lancelot Chauncey to himself as he walked away. "What in the world are they out so early for? A nice little bit of scandal to give a zest to Minnie's matutinal meal! A queer world this, and queer taste that fellow must have to prefer staring into a stagnant pool, with a great artificial thing like that, when a little gem—thunder and lightning!"

This exclamation was caused by the apparition that was advancing towards him of Diane, probably the "little gem" that had been in his thoughts, leading her horse by his bridle.

She stood still as Lancelot, taking off his

hat, approached her, and said laughing, when she had returned his greeting,

"Every one seems mad this morning, I think. Is Mrs. Ross out before breakfast too?"

"Oh no; if early rising after a ball be madness, my cousin is perfectly sane. But surely, Miss Deshon, you are not alone?"

"Miss Field and Gussie are there. Can you not see some people at the fountain? We were having a race, but I dropped my whip, and so let them go on without me. My horse is unworthy of his knightly name, for he takes advantage of my being stupid and sleepy, and will not let me mount him again. Should you mind putting me up, please?"

"Oh, don't send me away, Miss Deshon," Lancelot said, in his plaintive, fascinating voice. "You are tired, and it will be far better for you to wait here till your people come back. See, there is a seat under that tree. Give me these;" and, taking the bridle and whip from her hand, he led the horse off the road on to the grass, and Diane followed him to the little bench he had indicated under a chestnut. "And of what gallant knight of romance is this misbehaving steed the uncourteous name-

sake?" Lancelot inquired, as he threw away the cigar he had been smoking and sat down by Diane's side.

"The noblest and best—the greatest hero of romance," she answered.

"And that is——?"

"Why, *Lancelot*, of course!"

"I am called that too."

"Are you? How glad you must be!"

"Glad—why?" asked Lancelot, amused.

"I think it must be so nice to have the same name as any one who has done great deeds, even if it is only in fiction; it must be a sort of inducement to become like the person. You ought to be very brave, Mr. Chauncey."

"But, according to your theory, you yourself might think fit to be very cruel, and I hope you are not so. I do not think you are."

"Ah! that horrible Diane de Poitiers. I often think of her—I wonder when Gussie and Harrie will come back."

"You want to get home. I can see that you are very tired; you ought to be in bed. Why did you come out?" said Lancelot. "Is there no one to take care of you, poor child?"

"Oh, it is very silly of me to be tired. Harriette is as fresh as a bird this morning, and she danced more than I did; but then she is accustomed to balls, and I have not danced for two years, so I suppose it is not odd that I should feel stiff and tired, being so frightfully out of practice."

"You should not call yourself out of practice; you are the most perfect partner I ever danced with," Lancelot said, looking into her face, his expression betraying the great admiration he did not care to conceal. "Your movement is poetry and music—to look at; but to valse with you is like—I cannot find a simile."

"You know well how to flatter," said Diane, blushing deeply; "I am not used to such grand compliments."

"No? Well, I am not surprised at that; you are not the sort of girl to talk bosh to, Miss Deshon—or slang either. Forgive me that word."

"Then why did you do both?" she asked, her grey eyes twinkling.

"Is it not allowable to mention the fact of one's sincere admiration, without its being

termed nonsense and flattery? I was speaking perfect truth, and not flattering you in the least."

"I am accustomed to think that everything that sounds pretty is flattery," said Diane. "I judge men by my cousin, who pays the most extravagant compliments to people, that I know he does not mean at all."

"If all ladies were as philosophical or sceptical as you, there would be no more broken hearts—as regards your sex, at least. But that cousin of yours is a clever man, and manages to take in other people as well as Miss Field, who I don't think receives all he says as mere flattery."

"Ah! Of course he does not *entirely* flatter *her*, for he does really admire her excessively, naturally, because she is so beautiful and enchanting."

"She is a handsome woman certainly, and accomplished; but she is too old for your cousin. When they have been married ten years he will still be quite a young man, and she utterly *passée*."

"Mr. Chauncey! What do you mean? They are not going to be married. You

do not think she is in love with him, do you?"

"I do not see why she should not be. He is an uncommonly handsome fellow, and you women think such a deal of a man's looks; and I fancy he is in love with her."

"My cousin and I have been engaged to each other for ever so long, and our marriage will take place before next winter," said Diane quietly.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Deshon, ten thousand times over; I have made a great fool of myself. I quite forgot—that is, I hardly knew, though I ought to have remembered, that Lady Cockburn told me. Will you *please* forgive me for wounding your feelings? I entreat you, don't be angry with me!"

Lancelot spoke the truth when he said he had forgotten the fact of his having heard of Gussie Deshon's engagement to his cousin, which circumstance his sister Margaretta made known to the whole circle of her acquaintance, although Diane was personally known to but few of the number. Although, unlike girls in general, Diane did not crave a passionate lover's worship, Lancelot's speech was a little stab to

her woman's pride; yet she answered him with a smile.

"There is no need for such abject apology on your part, Mr. Chauncey; even Margaretta allows that any romantic rapture about our engagement would be absurd, and Gussie and I are as humdrum a couple as though we had been married years and years—a real nineteenth-century pair—just what the world approves."

And Lieutenant Lancelot Chauncey amongst the number, in theory; yet when this Diane, whom he had thought of last night, and till a moment ago, as a little simple, pretty, amusing child, spoke in the tone and manner of the world she mentioned, and to the trammels and conventions of which he, Lancelot, was so complete a slave and victim, he felt a little thrill of disappointment and dislike towards her; and as his cousin Minnie's perfect love for her husband, and Fred's thorough happiness in his family, came into his mind, he answered with something like contempt in his voice—

"So you make a man marry you without having the least love for him, or caring whether he loves you. What motive can you have in thus injuring him?"

"Injuring!"

"Yes. I say a wife who openly professes that she does not love her husband injures him, and renders herself, in the eyes of men, and any right-feeling member of her own sex, a despicable object."

It is not in the nature of any one, a woman more especially, tamely to endure being designated as "a despicable object," even when conscience confesses that the epithet be warrantable; but question respecting the right or wrongfulness of her marriage with Gussie, being so utterly novel to her, perhaps added a little hauteur to her demeanour, as she replied with spirit,

"Whatever my motives may be on this or any subject, I believe I am capable of judging as to their propriety."

An angry colour that had risen in her cheeks gave her heavy eyes the brilliancy they had previously lacked that morning; and as Lancelot, his momentary vexation and annoyance giving place to amusement at "the little thing putting herself in such a pet," he thought her far more beautiful than he had imagined, and began to learn that behind those clear, grey

eyes there lurked far more of interest and character than he had fancied, or than any one hitherto had discovered.

"I have been most unjustifiably impertinent and *brusque*, Miss Deshon," he said solemnly, "and for the second time this morning I most humbly beg your forgiveness, though now I scarcely dare hope you can overlook my insolence. You desired me just now to mount you; may I still have the honour? Your cousin and Miss Field are approaching—curse them!" he mentally added, being much provoked with them for not delaying until a pardon was won from those pretty lips, as Mr. Chauncey, even at this early period of their acquaintance, allowed to himself that he felt an interest concerning her, deeper than he had often experienced towards her sex upon so slight an intimacy.

Diane, hardly realizing the effect Lancelot's rebuke had had upon her, coming as it did so unexpectedly and suddenly, just as she was beginning to be conscious, although she could not understand what the sensation meant, of his undeniable fascination of manner, felt, as she silently allowed him to lift her to her

saddle, like a tiresome child being dismissed. The blush still stained her cheeks as the others rode up, laughing at the odd coincidence of the meeting. She sat silent and dignified, whilst her cousin, with magnificent hospitality, pressed Lancelot to come back to breakfast with them, which invitation, however, was declined, and the trio soon trotted off, leaving the pedestrian to walk slowly after, still anathematizing Gussie and Miss Field, and musing for full two miles upon what he finally arrived at regarding as "the lamentable fate of Diane Deshon!" He could not quite understand the circumstances of the case; yet, from what he had heard from Lady Cockburn—though, feeling no interest at the time, he had but partially listened to the information, and now had more than half forgotten it—and what he had been able to remark for himself, he came to a pretty correct conclusion concerning the cousins' engagement.

"Stupid little beast! He ought not to have her," he meditated, the creature of sluggish mind in question being, of course, Gussie Deshon; and then a mischievous determination began to germinate within the breast of my

hero, of preventing the alarming sacrifice that such a marriage would be. There was no intention of substituting himself as Diane's husband, thereby securing a pleasantly great fortune, with a lovely wife; nor was he, albeit not wholly ignorant or doubtful of his captivating qualities, quite coxcomb enough to consider that by flirting with her he should do any damage to Diane's heart; nor, above all, did he feel the dimmest prescience of trouble on his own account.

One thing Lancelot had resolved by the time he entered the Rosses' breakfast room, the subject of which need not be entered into now, as its result will follow in due course presently.

"You were as red as a peony, Di, when we came up. Why have you brushed off the rouge?—it was quite becoming," drawled Gussie, almost before they were beyond distance of Lancelot's hearing. "Oh, don't yawn—that is so very rude."

Diane forced a laugh, and rubbed her hand across her eyes, for, though she could not think why, Harriette's sly glances were directed at her, nor could she tell how it was they made her so uncomfortable. Miss

Field was in glorious spirits, constantly bursting into snatches of song, her voice sounding marvellously clear and fresh, like a bird's carolling, as they rode along in the soft, warm summer morning air.

"Then it is your own fault. I am sure you're telling stories, and have a thousand," Gussie and Diane cried simultaneously, as Harriette warbled,

"'Ilka lassie has her laddie,
Ne'er an ain hae I!'"

'"C'est bien vrai! But I care not one jot, so long as the generality 'smile at me coming through the rye,'" she replied as they reached home; and Gussie wreathed his beautiful mouth into a pantomimically sentimental smirk, thereby displaying a faultless set of teeth, declaring himself "ready to smile for ever and aye, in accordance with Miss Field's desire."

"But you look like a Cheshire cat, and Harrie isn't coming through any rye at present, but coming to breakfast," said Diane, patting a good-bye to Sir Lancelot. They went into the violet drawing-room, where Harriette, who was in a most musical mood that morning, sat down at the piano, and rattled off a valse.

"'Su le, su le labbre,'" sang Gussie, spinning about.

"How dreadfully hilarious you are!" said Harriette, suddenly collapsing and becoming languid, as she noticed the expression of exhaustion on her friend's pale face. "Don't you know, sir, that 'if you sing before breakfast, you'll cry before supper?' Go and pick me some roses, and don't come back till breakfast is ready."

"Roses!

'A bud to whisper low
Something that I dare not speak.'

Madame, I obey;" and, with a languishing look, he stepped out on to the lawn; whilst Harriette, falling in a graceful attitude before the low chair on which Diane sat, wound her arms around her friend's waist, and said,

"Is anything the matter, my darling little pet? Did that nasty Chauncey displease you, sweet? I thought, when we joined you, that he had kissed you, from your manner and his sheepish look."

"Harriette! I am not a barmaid in a farce, and" (slightly repelling her) "I believe Mr. Chauncey is a gentleman."

"Oh, he is immensely well connected. His

brother is a baronet, and his mother was the daughter of a duke."

"And he is a regularly worldly, popular, fashionable man, I suppose. Yet, for all that, his manners are not exactly what I admire. I did not feel it so much last night—in fact, I did not notice it at all; but to-day he talks too patronizingly, and as though he thought one such a goose."

Here she rose to take off her hat and smooth her perfectly orderly hair at a looking-glass, where she was struck by the decidedly cross expression on the little weary face reflected. She put a force upon herself and her temper; and, as though she felt some amends were due to her cousin for her being unable to lavish upon him the fervour of poetical and ideal love, she made herself the light and spirit of the breakfast table, devising plans for the enjoyment of her visitors, chattering gaily about the pleasures of the previous evening, silencing her aunt's upbraidings, who, when she appeared, was as severe upon the imprudence of the early ride after so many hours of fatigue and excitement as it was in her gentle nature to be, by the declaration that it had

been charming, and that she did not feel in the least done up. Which was barely true, for when, at the end of the meal, she perceived, with the usual tact of a perfectly unselfish and simple-minded woman, that, despite all her amiability and laudable intentions, Gussie seemed only bent upon dawdling away the morning in flirtation with her friend, who, on her part, appeared to desire no better occupation or amusement, she went upstairs to her own room, where all the doubts and questions that were springing into life within her were soon lulled for the while by a sound and peaceful slumber.

Harriette, soon deeming that her society would be more ardently valued and desired by the man whom she intended eventually to possess the right of claiming it as his very own for ever, if at this present early stage of his admiration it was occasionally denied him, yielded to Mrs. Deshon's advice and her own fatigue, and withdrew to change her dress and lie down.

But her mode of resting at first was to pace up and down her room, with lips compressed and contracted brows, musing on the events

of the two past days, and weighing the chances of Gussie's proposing to her.

"How long will it be before the little gaby finds out that he wants to marry me? Can it not be managed that *Di* shall be the one to break off their stupid engagement? How will it end?—how will it end? She is already taken with Lancelot Chauncey; he has fascinated her, as every woman he delights to honour, to throw the handkerchief to, is captivated by him! How that man dislikes me! and I—though I wonder why—*I hate him!* Yet I pardon him if he serves my purpose now. I wonder what he did to-day to put that girl out so? Little fool! to be scared by a man's mere flirting! If she could know—— Bah! women are dolts, and men beasts. If Di were to get very spooney, she would be too honourable to marry the little cousin. *Honourable!* she can afford to be honourable. Born, bred in pleasure and love and luxury as she has been, *I* would be honourable, if—— No, I wouldn't; but I would be good if I had her money. Her money? *Half* her money! Half? Oh! I must keep a tight grasp over this! How his little snivelling mother will

rage inwardly when I am presented to her in the character of a dear, future daughter-in-law! The old Judas will *kiss* me, I suppose, and wish me buried!"

She had worked herself into a state of passionate excitement, this woman who, not two days ago, had said to herself that she had not thought to feel excited again during her life.

A glimpse of her hot, flushed face reflected in a mirror, checked her in her restless promenading, and she sat down to fan herself and wait till she thought it expedient to return to her enjoyable work of laying siege to Gussie's heart and hand.

A little further introduction to Miss Field and enlightenment as to her history is perhaps desirable, and may be given in the words often employed about her some years ago, before her position in the circles to which her beauty and her musical accomplishment had introduced her was thoroughly asserted.

"Harriette Field—oh, she's a regular garrison hack; she has lived all her life at Dover, and knows every regiment in the Army List. She has no brothers or sisters; her father is a gentlemanly old nonentity, a retired Post

Captain; everybody at Dover knows him. They used to be rather poor, but old Field married a third wife a little while ago—a widow with a jointure, and Harriette has been taken up by one or two people of the respectable Bohemian, Mrs. Burnaby sort, so that they are beginning to cut quite a dash."

All of which was perfectly true, and Miss Field's prospects looked bright and fair and easy enough; and if she was not in the habit of saying much about her relations or her home life and past experiences, the world did not remark her reticence, and she had her place in society amongst those by birth and fortune her superiors, generally admired and liked very well by her own sex, by the other held in something that was beyond admiration and less than liking—a beautiful, graceful, agreeable woman.

About four o'clock, when the heat of the afternoon was subsiding, the "garrison hack" made a ravishing toilette, and descended to the drawing-room, where Gussie was listlessly picking out tunes on the piano with one finger, nearly distracting his much enduring mother, who was trying to write a letter. Harriette's entrance was almost a relief to her, though she

rather disliked, and wholly disapproved of, the young lady; but Gussie's music was put an end to by his enchantress smilingly beckoning him to follow her on to the lawn.

Diane, refreshed with her sleep, came downstairs soon afterwards, and, finding every one employed, took a book, and, nestling herself into an easy chair, endeavoured, with the thrilling pages of a sensation novel before her eyes, to banish from her mind the tiresome feeling of unsettled doubt that was so new to her, and which had returned in all its force, and greeted her immediately on waking, until a visitor was announced, who to her extreme pleasure proved to be Mrs. Ross.

CHAPTER V.

"Men were deceivers ever,
One foot on sea, and one on shore,
To one thing constant never!"

PERCEIVING the white-robed, blue-snooded form of Harriette Field sitting with Gussie under the willows at the foot of the garden, Mrs. Ross had determined to pay her intended visit to her neighbour at a time when she was certain of finding her at home.

"For she wouldn't have gone out alone, although those two spooney people cannot be very lively company," she thought, as she moved from her bedroom window, and proceeded to attire herself for her call, which business did not occupy a great space of time, for in five minutes after her first glimpse of Harriette she was in Diane's drawing-room.

"How very kind of you, Miss O'Grady,"

cried Diane, rising joyfully and presenting her visitor to Mrs. Deshon.

"You see I have come all alone," said Minnie, "and my husband will be furious—utterly savage, when I tell him I have been to see you, Miss Deshon, after all; for we were talking at luncheon about when we would come and call, and I told Fred that you would be too tired and done up to receive anybody to-day, and so he went to Kingston, to leave our cards on Mrs. Burnaby, and then on to Hampton Court, to pay a call there; but I felt so irresistibly like coming in just now—I was dull, all by myself, for my daughters are gone to Bushey Park on a donkey, and my cousin has gone back to London, like a goose."

"How many little ones have you, Mrs. Ross?" inquired Mrs. Deshon, whilst a momentary flush appeared in Diane's face, that did not escape the bright eyes of Minnie, as she replied to Mrs. Deshon's question.

"Two, and a baby; but he isn't worth mentioning, because he is a boy. I can't endure little boys. Baby is all very well now, but I shudder at the thought of what he will be presently."

"Why anticipate anything disagreeable?" said Mrs. Deshon, laughing.

"Because," said Mrs. Ross emphatically, "boys are always nasty from the time they can walk. They get rude and dirty and ugly, and they become young men, and *then* are a never-ending source of anxiety to their parents and people."

"Always?" asked Diane. "Colonel Ross, for instance?"

"Ah, now, but that's different. He is married, and the sweetest—— I dare say, though, he was a very nasty, naughty, untidy boy. I'm thankful to say I didn't know him till he had grown nice. But look at Lance Chauncey, my cousin. Ever since I can recollect, he has been a trouble: first of all at Rugby, where he was always getting bad accidents from playing football; then, at Sandhurst, he would play the violin instead of studying; and now, who can call him satisfactory? You may think, one day, that really he is perfectly happy, and content to be quiet and nice with you; and the next, he is off to Khamschatka, and you don't hear anything of him for a century—he is so tire-

some. And then he is for ever getting himself talked about for some girl or other, and we think he will marry and grow respectable and domesticated, when suddenly he goes off and flirts with somebody else, quite different; and if ever I try to reason with him, he says he never intends to marry, except it were for money, and abuses women as a set of frivolous butterflies, fit for nothing but flirting and rubbish. He has no more heart than a pin!"

Dear little Mrs. Ross's friends said of her, that she was given to chattering her comical sentiments at great length, with no deeper thought or intent than the mere love of hearing her pretty voice run on; but that was not the case in this instance, for with a firm belief in her cousin's power of pleasing, having often seen with regret the effect which his attentions had had upon her sex, Minnie made it rather a point of conscience to put every nice girl whom she believed in danger on her guard against him. She could not tell, of course, whether a word of warning was necessary in this present instance; but that meeting in Bushey Park, though Lancelot had declared it to be purely accidental, looked as though the

flirtation of last night had gone pretty far, and this little Miss Deshon seemed just the simple, inexperienced sort of girl to be made thoroughly miserable by a thoughtless man's amusing himself. Mrs. Ross even believed in love at first sight, and was fond of relating how one day, some half dozen years ago, when staying with Mrs. Burnaby in London, that lady had requested her to go to the drawing-room and entertain a visitor for a few moments, whilst she herself concluded an important interview with a milliner; how, entering the room gently, and unnoticed by the manly form of Captain Ross, who was standing with his back to the door, and one foot on the fender-stool, her heart gave one great beat, and she knew that this was the first and last man she could ever love; and he, seeing her reflection in the mirror over the fireplace, felt, "Here, by God's rood, is the one maid for me!"

Colonel Ross subsequently maintained that he was then just fresh from the hands of a haircutter, and was so intently gazing at the execrably crooked parting that had been given him, as to be totally unconscious of Miss

O'Grady's approach, until she gave a little cough, to attract his notice.

Diane felt a little puzzled at Minnie's tirade against her cousin. If Mr. Chauncey were the mere heartless worldling she made out, it was difficult to understand why he should have been so severe about her engagement that morning.

Baby Ross continued the subject of conversation for a few minutes, and his mother was beginning something about "the darling little fellow," when Diane interrupted.

"Ah, Mrs. Ross, Mrs. Ross, you have betrayed a spark of maternal feeling for the poor little man, although he is of the sex you abuse!"

"Oh, of course he is a dear, sweetest angel now, but I don't doubt but that I shall hate him entirely when he's big; and seriously, do you know, I feel inclined to murder him sometimes, lest he should turn out badly—like his godfather."

"Is that Mr. Chauncey?"

"No, though he is called after him; his godfather is dead—poor wretched creature! Lancelot is Norah's godfather, but baby's,

Lord Kildorin. It is too long ago for you to remember about it, but all the world knew the dreadful story, and he left England, of course, and only came back a year ago, the most fearful wreck, dying of drink and all that; but we pitied him so much, that I could not help letting him stand for baby."

"Is not Kildorin an Irish name? We used often to meet a Lord Kildorin abroad, and my father told me he believed him to be our countryman."

"You're surely not a Deshon of County Donegal, with that beautiful property of Castle Deshon, near Ramelton?" cried Minnie excitedly.

"Yes, that is our place; but I have never been in Ireland. We were always on the Continent till last year, when papa died. You see I am half French—my mother was a French woman, and papa lived most of his life in France. I suppose Ramelton is very lovely; I wanted to go there now, instead of taking this house, but my aunt is afraid we should all be shot by Fenians."

"Not up in the north. I come from Enniskillen, and Kildorin is quite close to us. The

O'Lary boys and Lancelot and I were all like brothers and sister. Oh, you should go to Castle Deshon. I was only at Ramelton once in my life—during my honeymoon it was, and we both declared we had never seen such a lovely place, and that it was indeed worthy of its name, 'The Garden of Donegal.'"

Mrs. Deshon had risen to fetch a large portfolio of photographs. "You may like to see these," she said; "Diane's agent, Mr. Kennedy, sent them to her not long ago, and she naturally feels tempted to go and see if her estate is as beautiful a place as these views represent, but we all have urged her to put off her visit until after her marriage."

"You know that riddle about making treason reason, and Ireland poor?" said Diane. "The owners of Castle Deshon have been absentees for so many years, that my cousins, who have not the yearning for the ancestral home that I rather feel, tease me by comparing me to 'Lara,' and saying some horrible calamity will befall the family if I go and live there."

"Marry, and go there for your honeymoon, and snap your fingers at your cousins—that's

my advice," said Mrs. Ross, who was looking with great interest at the views.

"You must tell that suggestion to Gussie," said Mrs. Deshon, anxious that Minnie should understand the position in which the cousins stood with regard to each other; indeed, the poor little lady seldom missed an opportunity of bringing forward the subject of the engagement, the fact of which was not by any means obvious.

Lancelot had not divulged the circumstance of his being intimate with Diane's cousin, Lady Cockburn, having chosen to be unusually reticent concerning his enjoyment of the previous evening. When the Rosses were discussing the merits of Mr. Burnaby's ball over their luncheon table, Diane was criticised by him as "a graceful, unaffected little thing, looking quite as well on horseback as in full dress and jewels;" but he ignored her engagement, and allowed Minnie to speculate as to whether there were anything more than mere flirtation between "the little dandy," as she styled him, and Miss Field, so that she was considerably amazed when Mrs. Deshon continued,

"You see, my dear, my son Augustus and Diane, having been in love with each other all their lives, are not in such a hurry to be married as people who do not know each other till they are grown up, and then fall in love suddenly and become engaged; and also Diane has only lately lightened her mourning for her papa."

When the sensation had first arisen Diane could not tell—she did not remember having ever experienced it before, and yet the feeling of vexation at the mention of her engagement did not appear perfectly novel to her. She was aware somehow that she was not exactly the same childish, careless, happy little creature who had so thoroughly enjoyed herself at Mrs. Burnaby's; a scale had fallen from her eyes, and she saw but with the bewilderment of one to whom sight has ever been an unheard-of mystery, for she had not yet come quite to asking herself whether her engagement to Gussie was a subject of happiness or otherwise; all she knew was that she winced at the mention of it, annoyed with herself at the same time for feeling so incomprehensibly put out.

Mrs. Ross's thoughts went back to Diane's satin and gems of the night before, and the manner in which she and her *fiancé* had occupied themselves, in total independence of each other. She looked for the conscious, half-pleased blush that mantles to the cheek at most times, when a young girl hears her engagement mentioned unexpectedly, and of course could not guess the true reason of the faintly deepening tint on Diane's fair alabaster cheek, as she offered her congratulations, extolling her exemplary conduct in public.

"So beautifully they behaved last night, Mrs. Deshon, I do assure you," the vivacious little woman ran on. "Nobody would have guessed they were engaged—just like Fred and me. Before we were engaged we used to carry on desperately, because, you know, we were both in love the very first time we ever saw each other. That was in London, at Mrs. Burnaby's; and then, the same year, he came to Dublin, where I was staying, and we were just as bad for a time, till one night in the middle of a valse we both collapsed, and said the magic vows; then we left off dancing together, and people said I had refused him, and we used

to die with laughter at all the silly gossip. And so at last, when our engagement was given out—only a few weeks before we were married—every one was amazed. I *do* like keeping things dark."

And her mobile little face assumed an impenetrable expression, which was meant to imply that she would be silent as the grave about Diane's engagement, so she felt somewhat astonished when Diane said,

"I think our engagement is pretty well known; you see it is a humdrum sort of affair, without an atom of romance. I am not at all a sentimental person, nor is Gussie."

"Any more than Mr. Lancelot Chauncey," was in her thoughts; but where Minnie was, little time was there for much quiet meditation. She cried, "I declare I don't believe you! Do you mean to make me think that you are a cold, formal thing, without a bit of heart—I don't exactly mean heartless; but—don't you ever get into a passion, and can't you gush?"

"I think I am too lazy; yet, on some subjects—music, scenery, or books—I can be enthusiastic."

"You are incomprehensible. I am so de-

monstrative myself, that I cannot understand people being calm and cool about the man they love, just like a fish or a stone! Why, when Fred——"

But at this moment Gussie Deshon and Miss Field came through the window, and interrupted the interesting particular about "Fred," whose wife, after a very few minutes, declared "she had been there a million centuries, and didn't know what in the world they could think of her."

"I think it is very, very kind of you to have come, and I thank you so much," Diane said, holding her hand and kissing her new friend on either cheek, with a sweet, half-shy warmth, that was not much like a fish, nor yet a stone. Mrs. Ross returned home puzzled and interested, with a feeling of great affection and some pity for the beautiful girl, which deepened as day by day the intimacy increased between the two families.

"She is bewildering," Minnie would say to her husband continually. "There is so much mind and soul about her, and such a depth of feeling. Look at her with the children. I never saw any one with a greater capacity for

loving, or inspiring people with love. You can see, when you go to her house, that all her servants perfectly worship her; and yet she pretends that she will be happy with that puppy of a creature, who doesn't care two straws for her—that she *is* happy, though she owns that she is not in love with him, and never has been in love in her life!"

"I would not mind taking any odds that she won't marry the cousin," said Colonel Ross on one occasion, adding his firm conviction that "there would be a shine in the Deshon household ere very long."

CHAPTER VI.

"And she has hair of a golden hue,
Take care!
And what she says, it is not true,
Beware!
Trust her not."

If that "shine" in the Deshon family prophesied by Colonel Ross were to come to pass in the form of a rupture of the present matrimonial engagement, with the substitution of Miss Field as Gussie's *fiancée*, the only member of the family the course of whose life would remain unaltered by the change of arrangements would be the one person alone who would make any violent disturbance in opposition.

Gentle little Mrs. Deshon, though all her hopes and dreams of life would be shattered to annihilation, despite her almost dislike of Harriette,

would endeavour to believe that it was "for the best," concealing her disappointment to the best of her power, meekly retiring more completely than ever into the background, with the feeling that she had lost her boy (as is the usual case with mothers when their sons marry), instead of gaining in reality, as well as in idea, the daughter Diane was to her in affection; whilst Diane herself would feel no slight at the preference of her *ci-devant* betrothed for her friend, showering splendid gifts upon the bride, would wonder for a little while what to do now that the whole current of existence was altered, and remain the same sweet, dreamy thing that she had ever been, allowing herself to be managed and disposed of as her relations chose.

But Gussie's sister Margaretta, Lady Cockburn—older than her brother by two or three years, and far more advanced in shrewdness and knowledge of the world, having managed all the family, including her late uncle, since she was a mere child; managing herself into a rich marriage and good and prominent position in society—immediately she got scent of the state of affairs, would leave no means

untried for sending the presumptuous interloper to the rightabout, and driving matters back into their original stream.

It had been at Margaretta's instigation that Augustus Deshon had so willed the arrangement of his property after his death, and the marriage of the cousins. Had she not prompted him, the idea probably would never have entered his head, the children having been brought up, since the birth of Diane, so thoroughly like brother and sisters, he regarding them all with nearly the same amount of love.

The admiration excited by her excessive beauty (as, quite a young girl, Margaretta had been a perfect marvel of fresh English animal loveliness, brilliant Hebe colouring, and plump, well-moulded form), her sparkling wit, and accomplishments, had been a source of pride to her mother and uncle, wherever they went, though at the same time Augustus was half conscious of a sensation of satisfaction that his own little girl was not growing up to be a second flashing meteor amongst them; and though not one member of the family, even in their most inward private thought, enter-

tained such an idea, it was certain, nevertheless, that when their Commander-in-Chief decided upon resigning the wandering, unsettled life the Deshons had led ever since the death of Augustus's wife, and assuming the management of Sir Malcolm Cockburn, instead of that of her relations, her absence, so far from being regretted, was an intense relief to them all.

Very few words are needed as to the husband of Lady Cockburn. That term is written unwittingly, and is not intended as a brief description of the place he occupied in the world: a mere appendage to his wife is not the lord that a woman of ambition and spirit, such as Lady Cockburn, desires; and Sir Malcolm was a man to love and to be proud of; and if not capable of feeling any great amount of the first, the latter at least was Margaretta.

Though her senior by a great many years, still he was little past the prime of life, a noted and influential member of the House of Commons, possessed of almost boundless wealth, master, well-nigh monarch, of vast estates in Scotland, where the "Cockburn" was dropped, and he was known by an appellation of far too many syllables and jaw-distorting gutturals

to trouble you with, having less of his country's wily prudence and parsimony than would be fancied from his great riches. He was a loving and docile, though not despicably abject, slave to his wife.

Though her health was not very good, and much of the *beauté du diable* was gone, and some angularity of figure had taken the place of lithe, girlish slimness, still Margaretta was ranked among the first of the belles of society, and had a numerous, if varying, train of courtiers and toadies.

But it was an ever-varying court, for she was a woman who fascinated either sex to a vast degree on first acquaintance, but of whom one speedily wearied, to grow distrustful of after a while, and even to dislike. This last would be more the case with her own sex than with men, for no woman not wholly repulsive in appearance, deeply and visibly valuing men's admiration, can be utterly displeasing to them in their vanity, and there was in Lady Cockburn's nature an inordinate love of worship and attention, with much coquetry, and, where she deemed it worth while, a great desire to charm and give pleasure; but many and many a

time had a fair adorer and imitator of this lady deposed her idol from its pedestal, unable to endure for long the indescribable air she possessed of patronizing disparagement in reviewing the actions of those about her, a manner she had of taking the lead on all occasions, laying down the law with such perfect faith in her own judgment, and confident expectation of being believed in by the world around.

But even those whom she had most deeply annoyed and offended liked to visit at her house, owning that she was a wonderful woman, and envying her power of management, and the undeniable knack and originality she displayed in the entertainment of her guests, or the arrangement of her furniture and toilettes.

She made the exigencies of society a study, was rather exclusive in her circle of acquaintance, and planned her parties as though they were affairs of state. The settling of a dozen friends for dinner, or designing a costume for a ball or drawing-room, would perhaps occasion her an hour or two's deep thought and consideration; but their result would finally be utterly faultless, their perfection being, in Lady

Cockburn's mind, sufficient and ample reward for any amount of previous meditation and anxiety.

She was busied, on the afternoon subsequent to Mrs. Burnaby's ball at Kingston, in the (to her) all-important occupation of writing notes of invitation for a final dinner before leaving London, and was disturbed by the entrance of her maid, inquiring if it were her ladyship's pleasure to be "at home," as there was a ring at the door-bell, and she, being in her own dressing-room, and having given no orders, the footman did not know how to proceed with regard to visitors.

After a moment's thought, during which space she remembers that the various bores and discreditables of her acquaintance, "The Tags and the Rags, and the No one knows Who's," either are out of town or else have called so recently, that there is no chance of their coming to-day to *ennuyer* her, Lady Cockburn signifies that she will "receive," finishes her notes, and then sails downstairs, her handsome face wearing a bright, pleased expression as she enters the drawing-room, for she has delayed long enough in the boudoir

to learn the name of her visitor, and it is one whom she would willingly consider among the list of her admirers; and though she might see upon the hall table, in the course of the London season, some three or four of his cards, and although he is generally at her evening parties for a few minutes, notwithstanding the extreme cordiality and graciousness of her bearing towards him whenever they meet, he has never seemed to seek or wish for any increase of intimacy.

A tall, slim, almost boyish figure stands with his back towards the lady, when she enters the room, so intent upon the contemplation of a picture on the wall, that the rustle of her silk gown does not disturb him until she lays a hand upon his arm, with—

"Ah, Mr. Chauncey! Am I to consider your state of absorption of that portrait as a compliment to myself, or is it Alfred Seymour's painting that has so won your approbation?"

"Forgive me, Lady Cockburn; your approach was so silent, I had no idea any one was near me. I hope you are well, if mortal can be well in such stifling weather. I am fortunate to find you at home; so many people have left

town. I came up from ——. I have been away for two days, and I see a change."

"Yes, town is thinning fast; I am longing to get away. You see, Sir Malcolm must wait till the close of the session before going to Scotland; but I am thinking of burying myself alive till then, immolating myself upon the shrine of family love and duty."

"Where is to be the scene of the sacrifice?"

"The banks of the Thames," replied Lady Cockburn. "You know my brother, Gussie Deshon? You may have heard me talk of his affairs; he is engaged to be married to our little cousin, the child in Mr. Seymour's picture with me. She and my mother have taken a fancy to a damp little cottage at Teddington, or somewhere thereabouts, and want me to come and see the place, and swear it is enchanting; so until Sir Malcolm is ready to start for the North, I must go and catch rheumatism, and die of *ennui*—— Do you think that picture is in a good light?"

Lancelot had been gazing beyond the lady all the while she had been speaking, at the lady's portrait, looking not so much at the fair-haired maiden, as at the representation of

the pale, slight form whose arm encircled her sister's waist in the picture. In answer to Lady Cockburn's query, he rose, and standing where he had been when she came into the room, said,

"I like looking at this picture, Lady Cockburn. Do you know, I think Seymour—though of course he has painted many fair things—never equalled this in style, and he certainly has never been more successful in his choice of a subject."

It really had not occurred to Lancelot Chauncey before, that the picture had any greater merit than that of being a carefully painted likeness of two girls, perfect in their different types of beauty. It was of some value in a modern collection, as being one of the earliest productions of an artist still young in years, but fast attaining laurels and renown; and it was of boundless worth to Lady Cockburn, for—no life is without its romance—it ever kept fresh in her memory the days when it had appeared possible to her to believe that the world's greatest joys were to be found in an artist's studio, and that she could abandon those gay, brilliant circles in

which she was so bright an ornament, and for love's sake sink down into mere Bohemianism, the wife of Alfred Seymour, a penniless, obscure adventurer, whose acquaintance she had made at Rome, where he was studying that art which in a few years was to win him fame and affluence.

But that time was far distant now: Lady Cockburn was happy according to her light, and Alfred Seymour had gained another mistress—success. He was the fashion, caressed and spoilt universally; and no one knew of all the struggles that had of old taken place in Margaretta's bosom, ere every notion of her weak sentiment for him had been finally strangled and exterminated. Nevertheless, she liked to listen to the praises of her "old friend," as she was wont to term the artist, and followed Lancelot to the picture, saying, in the ringing, high-pitched voice habitual to her, "I have grown so *dreadfully* thin since that was painted, that sometimes I wonder at anybody's recognizing it as my likeness; whilst Di, my cousin, who was little more than a child at the time, looks rather younger and prettier now than she is here. It is a nice little *mignonne* face, is it not, Mr. Chauncey?"

"If it were not by the side of yours—you will resent my saying it of your cousin; but it seems insignificant—the Moon eclipsed by Sunshine," said Lancelot, wondering as he spoke what had made him speak such nonsense.

"I wish I could blush," drawled Lady Cockburn, as she sank into an easy chair, motioning her visitor to occupy one equally comfortable by her side. "But no; really Diane is not insignificant, though she has *no* manners, positively, and is as unsophisticated as a school-girl; no one would believe that she had travelled all over the continent, mixing in foreign society, before she was twenty-one. She is quite an intellectual girl, and intensely well educated and accomplished, and musician enough to satisfy even you; but she is a mere child when all's said."

"Your brother is a fortunate fellow." Lancelot felt this so forcibly, that the emphasis his voice assumed did not escape the notice of Lady Cockburn, who seldom allowed the merits of others, especially her own sex, to be discussed very long before mixing in a little leaven of depreciation. "Yes," she said, with a little shrug, "he will have a good

docile, little wife, but a very tame one. I could wish she were not quite so gentle and milk-and-waterish; she seems to lack character. I can fancy people thinking her stupid even, which is far from true."

"Xantippe would be a more interesting wife to have than Griselda," Lancelot observed.

"Ah, that sentiment is worthy of you, it is like yourself to say so; there is no want of tone and character in *you*, Mr. Chauncey."

Very many pairs of fine eyes had languished at Lancelot in his life, and two more brilliant, lamplike, brown orbs than Lady Cockburn's had seldom met his own; but he had not come there to flirt with her, so he only made a salaam in acknowledgment of her compliment, and made their conversation drift off into the gossip and small talk of the season, till he rose to take his departure.

"By-the-by," said Margaretta, as they shook hands, "how early Mrs. Burnaby left town this year. I hear that her place at Kingston is so beautiful, that she has thoughts of giving her house in Princes' Gate. I hope she not, though, for her parties are nearly my chances of hearing your violin. She gave

a great ball last night. I was very sorry I could not manage to go to it."

"It was a capital ball—everything so well arranged."

"You were there?" exclaimed Lady Cockburn. "Gussie and Diane went, I suppose? How did Diane look? Ah! I forgot you said she is so insignificant-looking in her portrait; I dare say you did not notice her."

"I had the honour of dancing with Miss Deshon; Miss Harriette Field presented me to her."

No mask betrayed less expression than did Lancelot Chauncey's countenance at that minute, though Lady Cockburn's penetrating eyes were upon him, in wonder that the circumstance of his meeting Diane had not divulged itself when they were discussing her. She let that pass, and said,

"Now, *please* tell me, candidly, as a friend —I *may* look on you as a friend, Mr. Chauncey? —you do not admire that Miss Field?"

"She is handsome, and very musical."

"With you that is everything, I know. Yes, I grant that she sings well, and is *rather* handsome, but she is such execrable style.

Her dress is so *prononcé*, and her ways!—I was much vexed when I heard that Diane had become intimate with her. Mrs. Burnaby knows some such very queer people, and it is a very mixed set one meets at her house. Diane actually has the creature staying with her at Riverbank, I heard this morning; however, I trust she will find the society of my mother and Di too monotonous for her, and so speedily take her departure."

As Mr. Chauncey did in the present instance, leaving the lady speculating as to the reason of his visit. She had too much sense, despite her great vanity, to attribute it entirely to his admiration of herself, else why should he have never called on her before?

"Did he take the trouble to come here only to tell me he had danced with Di? Folly! he plainly said that he did not admire her; or did he think to pump me about her money, and then go in for cutting out Gussie? That's more the mark. I expect he flatters himself he fascinated the little goose last night—yet he is not a man to care about marrying, after all, and there are girls as rich as Di in the world. But I am glad I refused to have

her with me for the season—it would have been too great a risk!"

Then her musing glided away into schemes for the guidance and management of her little cousin's establishment in London the following season, when Diane, under the valuable patronage of her sister-in-law, was to occupy a creditable position in society, and Mr. Chauncey, in connection with Miss Deshon, was forgotten, more especially so when Lady Cockburn saw him at the Opera that evening, apparently existing solely in the smiles of the lovely and unfortunately-mated Lily Vane Emerton, whose name throughout two years had been coupled with that of Lancelot Chauncey, and who, on account of her favourite cavalier, was called indiscriminately "The Maid of Astolat" and "Queen Guinevere." And Lancelot, after he had left Lady Cockburn's house, asked himself what in the world had made him go there. Sated and wearied with dissipation, tired of the life he spent, and of himself, he had, two days ago, escaped from the whirl and glare of London, a magnanimous feeling within him that he was doing so not so much for his own sake, as

to stop the mouths that were whispering so unkindly, if not unfairly, about a lady whose attraction towards him was so palpably evident, which, though not displeasing to himself, was not a subject of either sentiment or actual pleasure, and was on the verge of becoming rather a bore.

He had obtained leave of absence from his regiment for three months, and had not meant to appear again in London during that season; and when the more than passing interest with which Diane had inspired him suggested to his mind the idea of calling on Lady Cockburn, in order to learn more about her, the notion of falling back into the old groove had not occurred to him; and when he found himself again in the midst of a circle of adulating friends, sought after by men, flattered and favoured by many women, he found it more difficult to break away a second time, though he blamed his lack of resolution, and the folly he had committed, in not remaining in the rest and happiness of the Rosses' little household, and day by day he wondered, half amused at himself for thinking of her at all, "whether that pretty little girl and Minnie had improved

their acquaintance," and if, should he go back to Teddington, "the quaint little thing would have forgotten her resentment at his interference in her concerns, and whether she would become so thoroughly satiating as Mrs. Vane Emerton, were he ever to grow equally intimate with her."

CHAPTER VII.

"What sort of a world will the world be now?
Oh, never again what the world hath been!
And how happen'd the marvellous change?
What my old life meant I begin to know,
But I know not what may this new life mean,
It is all so sweet and strange!

"Enough to be sure of—that, hand in hand,
We have seen, with each other's eyes,
The heavens grow happier o'er us,
And, here below in the lovely land,
As there above, in the blissful skies,
A world of beauty before us!"

To one of a less perfectly pure and unselfish disposition than that with which Diane was endowed Miss Field's calm but thorough appropriation of Gussie Deshon would have proved, and not unnaturally, a source of annoyance. But the little heiress, at present so

perfectly happy, and, like a child possessed of a new toy, enjoying the importance of ruling her small domain, incessantly devising grand plans for entertainment and hospitality, was not merely content, but even glad, that her beautiful guest and her fastidious cousin should suit each other so well as to leave no doubt of their being comfortable under her roof, and to save her from all apprehension of dulness on their behalf, for, though Miss Deshon was under the impression that her tastes were naturally very much in the way of gaiety and excitement, and believed that the chief pleasure of existence consisted in living surrounded by a brilliant and extensive circle of acquaintance, she had not been, so to speak, kept in moral cotton wool, under a glass case, during her twenty-two years, without acquiring thoughts and habits totally at variance with those of dissipation and society, and often, when living over again the pleasures of one of the rare excitements of her past life, or picturing herself a brilliant leader of fashion, like her cousin Margaretta, she had planned and manœuvred to get away, all by herself, that she might enjoy a quiet hour or two with

her books and music, which were in reality the companions most congenial to her nature.

As she had told Miss Field, much to the other's marvel, she knew scarcely anything of the world, though she had seen so much of the different countries where the world is to be learned and known. Her notions of love were of some great, impossible, or bygone passion of the age of chivalry, very pretty "when it meandered into metre," unknown in the nineteenth century, and certainly to be avoided when occurring in the pages of a modern novel.

So she was, as far as theory goes, a girl of the period, but, though she knew it not, wholly incapable of putting into practise this period's views. So perfect and delicate-minded a gentlewoman could no more be a mere empty butterfly of fashion and convention, than she could make her features other than the living marble of the perfect beauty in which they were moulded.

Whilst her ideas filled her villa to overflowing with guests, in reality she had no further acquaintances in the neighbourhood than the Rosses and Mrs. Burnaby, whose circle was too

extensive, and engagements too numerous, to enable her to be very useful to the aspiring hostess.

Young Alfred Burnaby certainly spent some hours of each day between Riverbank and Thamis Cottage, becoming, poor boy, more and more enamoured of the little heiress, who, however, seemed never to dream of the hopeless state of entanglement in which her kindly, genial liking for and notice of the good, honest lad had involved him; and, indeed, so specially boyish was he for his years, that no one thought of blaming Diane's conduct in allowing him to hang about her house, like a pet dog or relation, or for giving into his hands entirely her education in the management of the very tiniest canoe ever built, in which it was Diane's great delight to paddle about, dodging in and out amongst the beds of weeds and lilies in the river, while Harriette, her handsome face showing in strong relief against a background of crimson cushion, would recline under the willows, in the stern of Gussie's boat, snaring him warily and surely with the strange, subtle fascination of her large blue eyes and the measured monotony of her voice.

If it had not been that Mrs. Ross became so fond of her in an incredibly short space, Diane might possibly have felt disappointed that her friendship with Miss Field had hardly answered her expectations; for, notwithstanding the fact that one never attains an age when a certain amount of petting is not pleasant, very soon we are too old to feel that it is nice to be regarded only as a mere plaything. And in that light Harriette looked upon and treated the girl who, childlike and innocent as she was, though Miss Field could not understand it, possessed a mind many degrees in advance of metaphorical toys and bonbons.

It is a fortnight since that day on which Mr. Chauncey paid a visit to Lady Cockburn, and remarked that town was thinning fast. In those two weeks London had become considerably more empty, and every one was deciding that sea breezes, or cool, retired, country retreats were preferable to the parched and thirsty drive, baking pavements, and balconies full of tired, withering flowers. July was but three parts over, and the season could not be considered at an end, for Parliament was still sitting, and it is not every one who

is at liberty to follow inclination at any moment, in the direction of rural peace, or ocean's invigorating qualities; but some are more fortunate, and amongst the happy number of those to whose liberty of choice it was permitted to gasp an adieu to the London season, in the third week of July, was Mrs. Vane Emerton, who, with her husband and a pleasantly-organized party, went cruising along the south coast, in her brother's yacht, "Stella."

Lancelot, who, to the great disappointment of many and the surprise of all, had refused his brother officer Lord Lonville's cordial invitation to become one of the crew, with the inward confession that he had been foolish to leave it, returned to his cousin's cottage at Teddington; not this time quite without warning, but the note announcing his intention of arriving preceded him by so short a while, that, though Diane had spent some hours of the afternoon on the river, in the company of Mrs. Ross and her husband, she was thoroughly taken by surprise, when eight o'clock found her in the drawing-room of the cottage, at seeing Mr. Chauncey standing in the window, with one of the children in his arms.

After a great deal of consideration, and many playfully envious regrets that it was impossible at Thamis Cottage to attempt to vie with the French cookery and Sèvres china of Riverbank, Minnie had put sufficient force upon herself to issue invitations for a very dreary dinner party. She had implored Diane to come with all her guests, in order that there might be some refreshing and graceful element at the table, "For you know," she said, "the glass and china at furnished houses are almost always execrable, and here I think they are worse than usual. You can't think how I revel in your wine-glasses and plates! We have some decanters at home the same pattern as your claret jug. I wish we had brought them down here; but people never expect things to be perfect when one isn't at one's own house, and Fred really is extremely fond of poor old Lady Emily Despencer, at Hampton Court, and she is so fond of being asked out, and she is a great dear, only she *will* have a dreadful cousin to live with her; and we *must* ask her too, and the Macleans from Richmond are Presbyterians, and so T. P. that they think it wicked to laugh; and if you won't come, I

shan't have the face to ask any of the men from Hounslow to take Miss Vaux and Mrs. Maclean in to dinner."

But Diane had no desire to shun society, even in the form of stately and uninteresting dinner parties, and, promising to behave very grimly and properly to the Presbyterians, accepted the invitation readily for them all, with the exception of Mrs. Deshon, whose very delicate health prevented her ever visiting.

Mrs. Burnaby and her son, however, took the place of the unsmiling Macleans, who, to Minnie's unspeakable relief, happened to be previously engaged, so that after all the party was by no means the weary infliction the hostess had dreaded.

"Only fancy! there isn't a married man here, except Fred," cried Mrs. Ross, when her guests from next door had arrived. "Mr. Deshon, as you are the nearest approach to a husband, you must be done honour to, and shall go in to dinner with me. *Anything* to keep him away from that fat statue for an hour or two," she inwardly added, as she presented a Hounslow officer to Miss Field.

Gussie, a very Gawaine for courtesy, except,

sometimes, with regard to his cousin betrothed, simpered something *apropos*, and then made the most of the few minutes of his inamorata's company before dinner should separate them.

Lancelot, waiting to speak to her till Fred Ross's greeting was ended, noted the slight tinge in Diane's fair cheeks at Minnie's remark, and thought, with some degree of amusement, of his last meeting with her under the chestnuts in the avenue at Bushey; Diane also remembered their conversation, as was evident by the little expression of hauteur as she returned his bow; but it was not marked enough for him to think she was still annoyed with him, and her not shaking hands with him was only because she was hardly yet accustomed to English ways. He was appointed to take Mrs. Burnaby in to dinner; and that lady being one whose conversational powers were considerable and monopolizing, even were she placed on his other side, it would be impossible for him to devote himself to the heiress, so he now, like Gussie, made hay whilst the sun shone, and during the "*mauvais quart d'heure*," in this instance prolonged by the impunctuality

of the principal guest and her companion, Lancelot felt thoroughly revived in him those seeds of interest—if at so early a period we must not call it fascination—which had sprung up within him on the two former occasions of his talking to Diane.

Yet what was she more to him than a beautiful, refined lady, not less commonplace, if more graceful and engaging, than many a pretty *débutante* with whom he had flirted at her first ball? Only a happy, childlike, lovely little girl, who had most unmistakeably lost her temper, when he, from the height of his superior wisdom, had treated her as the child he believed her; but as they stood together near the open window, talking the most everyday twaddle, speculating as to whether the increased darkness foretold a thunderstorm, and if the heavy, hot air would be cooled by anything short of forty-eight hours' incessant rain, Lancelot knew that at each opening of the door he dreaded lest the announcement of dinner should break up their *tête-à-tête*, and take Diane away from him, out of his sight even, or perhaps, and which would be more tantalizing, place her, where he might look at her opposite to him,

with one of those waxed moustached Heavy Cavalry fellows, to bore her to death ; it would be dreadful to see her bored, though the alternative of her liking the conversation of Major Harvey or Captain Ingram as well as his own would have been even more distasteful.

Mrs. Ross, though she possessed that inexplicable art of infusing in all around her some of her own bright cheerful humour, was not so excellent a manager respecting dinner parties as Lady Cockburn, and the arrival of Lancelot had happened most opportunely for the proper balancing of the company at the dinner table.

"I have not seen Miss Deshon," said Mrs. Burnaby, using her gold eye-glasses to survey those seated opposite her.

"We came into the room just in front of her," Lancelot replied, and as he spoke a little face was stretched out beyond the broad form of the Dragoon Major seated at Mrs. Burnaby's other side, and the glittering opal moon upon her head informed them of Diane's position, before her features were visible.

The tide of conversation kept flowing very regularly throughout the ninety minutes of the

conventional English dinner, with but few of those lulls which sometimes are awkward and tiresome, but are often useful to a novelist, affording easy and natural opportunity for throwing the heroine into depths of woe, or rage, by a half-heard and wholly-misunderstood scrap of talk concerning her absent lover, sufficient to keep her immersed in misery for at least two volumes of the story; Lancelot endeavoured, though vainly, to know what the conversation could be about, in which he could hear Diane's little musical laugh and sweet voice, without being able to distinguish a syllable, whilst Mrs. Burnaby chatted on agreeably about London entertainments, different country and foreign watering-places, and their common acquaintances, judiciously pumping him as to his own plans for the autumn, satisfying herself "that she had been *perfectly right* in strenuously maintaining *all along* that the ridiculous gossip about poor Lily Vane Emerton was *utterly groundless.*"

The threatening thunder-shower fulfilled its promised arrival during dinner, but had spent all its force, and the sky was clear and starlit,

by the time the ladies returned to the drawing-room. Mrs. Ross, who vehemently upheld the Royal and continental custom of not leaving men to sit alone over their wine, always waited a very long time ere giving the signal for retreat, so that there was but a brief interval in which for the ladies to yawn, discuss dress, babies, and servants; indeed, it seemed to Diane that she had hardly been a minute talking with Mrs. Burnaby before Alfred, and the gentleman who had taken her in to dinner, were hanging over her chair, renewing the conversation which had, to them, appeared so suddenly and quickly interrupted.

When Lancelot, detained a few moments on his entrance to the room by some necessary piece of courtesy about Miss Vaux's fan, which she had dropped, or Lady Emily's coffee-cup, was free to go over to Diane, a proposal of Mrs. Burnaby's, that they should step out into the garden for a few minutes, had been warmly seconded by Major Harvey and Alfred, and he followed them on to the sloppy lawn, the night air seeming cool and fragrant after the heated atmosphere of the drawing-room, where even

the candles were suffering from the heat, and bending themselves out of the perpendicular, and guttering away helplessly.

The others had reached the river's brink, as he stepped out of window; but Mrs. Burnaby was already deeming it expedient to go in again, mindful of her slight shoes. Major Harvey, with a half-amused, patronizing air of acknowledging the palpable condition of Alfred's heart, had gallantly resigned the field to the younger man, and offered his arm to conduct the lady back to the house. In passing, they made some commonplace remark to Lancelot, who, on joining Diane and her boy adorer, said to the latter,

"Alfred, your mother says you will spoil your buckles out here in the wet."

Alfred looked contemptuously down at his steel shoe adornments, as who would say, "Perish the baubles!" and Diane, rather wondering that she had not followed Mrs. Burnaby's example and gone indoors, laughed, as she retorted,

"Don't spoil yours, Mr. Chauncey."

"A hint to retire," Lancelot said drily. "I am not obtuse, though, at times, ob-

stinate as the proverbial pig; I am not such a swell as this man, and don't boast any buckles, and won't go in, Miss Deshon—unless you command me," he added, his voice assuming the low, plaintive tone, that was his greatest charm.

"It's much jollier out here. Stop out, Miss Deshon, do," pressed Alfred, vigorously wiping a garden chair with his handkerchief. "The moon will be up in a minute, and that will dry the grass—at least, I mean I don't think it's very wet at all, only it will be even jollier when there's a moon. Don't you like the moon? I am desperate spoons on the moon!"

"There is no need of another moon where Miss Deshon is," said Lancelot; and, whilst he spoke, some white, gauzy clouds, which had obscured that luminary, of which Diane was the namesake, parted, and river, lawn, and trees were illuminated with all the brilliancy of a full, summer moonlight; and, as an odd coincidence, Harriette's rich, clear voice was audible, at the same moment, from the drawing-room, pealing forth the song, "*Vaga luna che inargenti.*" "This is a highly-favoured

spot, to possess three 'beautiful moons' all at once," was the neat little speech which found utterance from the ever-ready mouth of Lancelot Chauncey; whilst Alfred, in his boyish impetuosity declaring unreservedly the thoughts of his heart, followed suit with,

"Here's the queen of them all, though. Do you know, Miss Deshon, you look exactly like 'The Queen of Night.'—Mr. Chauncey, doesn't she look like 'The Queen of Night,' with this thing in her hair, and that black frock? You would do for a fancy ball, if you stuck on a veil, with little stars all over it. Oh, I'll have a fancy ball, when next I'm twenty-one —I mean when I'm married—no—on my next birthday. Will you come to it, as 'Queen of Night'?"

"I should like to be a queen, I think," said Diane, dreamily. "Not a fancy-ball one, but a real sovereign—not like our Queen, because she is a widow; but oh, how Queen Elizabeth must have enjoyed herself!"

"With fellows doing Euphuism, and taking off their coats for her to walk upon, and all that?" said Alfred.

"Ye-es; I don't think I should mind the

Euphuism, at least; but imagine how absurd it would look nowadays for a man to throw off his coat for one to tread upon."

"I see, you would be a queen in the nineteenth century," said Lancelot. "Will you believe yourself in that position? Oh! our most superlatively Regal Constellation, in your puissance condescend to regard two aspiring and devoted—— No! I fear I cannot emulate Sir Philip Sidney, or any of those clever gentlemen. Alfred, try and do your part better. Her Majesty's feet must be very wet—show your knightliness by the sacrifice of your one and only *dress-coat*, at any rate."

"Yes, it is my only one. How many have you got? It's only the second I have ever had in my life. Miss Deshon, I never had a dress-coat till I was sixteen; I looked such a muff in a jacket."

"Sir Walter, Sir Walter! don't be a goose!" cried Diane, laughing heartily. "Astrophel, put it on to him again!" for Alfred actually now stood before them in his shirt sleeves: he would have put himself in any position, done anything, for the sake of his first love—poor lad!

"Ah! don't be old Elizabeth; she was a regular cat! Be Queen of Riverbank, of Teddington—of the moon. Vivat regina!" he said, and began whistling the National Anthem.

Lancelot, at the same time, said in a low voice, "Viva la regina Luna!" and bent to do homage to the lovely sovereign.

"Alfred, Alfred!" Colonel Ross called from the window, and the boy tore away, as though running for a wager, that he might be able to return the sooner to his divinity; whilst Diane acknowledged her newly-acquired title with another bright, bird-like peal of laughter, and "What a pretty name!"

"May I call you by it sometimes?" Lancelot pleaded, looking into her gleaming eyes. He felt almost as though she were some pure, bright being of another sphere, so fair and *spirituelle* did she appear in the pale white moonlight.

Her reply, "Queen of Moonshine? oh yes!" should have brought him down to a commonplace *level;* but it failed to do so entirely, *and, without* drifting into "the melodramatic cant," as he termed his frequent style of conversation with her sex, he had begun to talk

to Diane as few women dislike to be talked to, when they heard those lines of Moore, about the infinite superiority of the present occasion over all preceding moonlights, repeated near them, and, turning round, they perceived that Gussie and Harriette were close behind them.

"My naughty little friend," Miss Field said caressingly, "you have been out in the wet quite long enough for the utter limpifying and destruction of all these bouillons, to say nothing of catching cold. Extravagant child of luxury, do you know the cost of a black tulle dress?"

"Not so much as a blue silk, is it?" asked Lancelot, wishing the azure robed and eyed speaker in the drawing-room at the nearest. However, neither Harriette nor Gussie cared to stay near the others, and in a few moments they were far enough away for Lancelot to speak the words that had been rising to his lips before the interruption. He had seen this lovely girl in two different moods; and though he certainly had no wish to offend or displease her, even for a moment, and was more fascinated by her bright, gay humour than the other, yet he felt an irresistible temptation to rouse again that fierce little spirit which had

amused him on the occasion of their last meeting.

"I will go in—it must be getting late," she said; and Lancelot, not liking to detain her, though more sorry than he well knew that the evening was indeed wearing to its close, half whispered, as he manœuvred that they should go up by a rather circuitous path to the house, instead of straight across the lawn, "Your kindness to me gives me hope that I am forgiven my offence."

"What do you mean?" she asked unconsciously.

Her unexpected reply a little confused him. It seemed unlikely that she should have forgotten their conversation; but such perfect dissimulation, if she remembered and did not choose to renew the discussion, was a phase in her character that he could not imagine, and was unprepared for. Yet it gave her a new charm in his eyes; this girl with the babyish expression of innocence upon her perfect face now had all the sweet dignity of a true woman added to her demeanour.

"Is it your generosity which makes you feign forgetfulness, or did I offend you too

deeply by my impertinent interference in your affairs the other morning, even to be allowed to ask your pardon?"

He stood still before her, and looked into her face, half thinking to see the angry flush, and black sparkle of the eyes, instead of which he found——

What? The sweet face met his glance for a moment only, to turn away with a blush that was not of anger, and a light partly of intelligence, partly wondering and inquiring, in her clear grey eyes. She did not know that the strange excitement that stole upon her was the awakening of her mind and soul, the first springing into bud of the great and chief passion of a woman's life; and Lancelot, though aware that this was such a moment of emotion as, perhaps, he had never before experienced—that though after this night there would be an indefinable something between Diane and himself, which should give intercourse with her an interest far, far above all ordinary flirtation—did not think exactly of the possibility of his being in love.

The eloquence of a few moments' silence did much for them both; when Diane next spoke,

pale and quivering, "Let us go in." Lancelot's voice was hoarse and nervous, as he replied, "Say first that you and I are friends; let me see and hear you tell me that you are not angry with me." Another, and this time a longer, of those dangerous, calm destroying meetings of the eyes: Lancelot's heart beat quick as he devoured with admiration the face, the lips that obeyed him.

"I was very cross," Diane owned presently, as they slowly resumed their walk; "but indeed I should not have remembered that you were the first person to irritate me about my engagement, if you had not put me in mind."

Afterwards, these words of Diane's recurred sweetly to Lancelot, as an involuntary confession of his power; now, they did not bear much in them. The bond that her hurried "I have quite, *quite* forgiven you; we are friends certainly," had formed between them was occupying his thoughts when they re-entered the drawing-room, where Diane was immediately pressed by Mrs. Ross for some music, notwithstanding that it was already later than the usual hour for the breaking up of suburban dinner parties, and the fact that Mrs. Burnaby

had been taking leave of her hosts ever since Fred had called Alfred in from the garden. Lancelot, with the thorough musician's horror of ladies' playing, and schoolgirl pieces, was disappointed that Diane so immediately and quietly complied with the request that she would play, despite Minnie's whisper whilst the pianist pulled off her gloves, "Her playing is something wonderful: I *never* heard an amateur equal to her!"

"I don't know music a bit, Miss Deshon; I'm awfully afraid I can't turn over. I never learned my notes; I'd better not try to turn over the leaves," purled Alfred, with a thick volume of songs in his arms. "Is this your music? Oh no; Miss Field's, I see."

"Do you play without notes?" Lancelot inquired, as he placed himself behind her, and remarked that she had put down the music desk.

"Generally," was the reply, as she began to play.

With Diane, to hear a tune merely once was to be able to render it with perfect harmonies and variations on the pianoforte, and a few hours' study was enough to stamp in her

memory the most severely complicated concerto of Beethoven or Mozart, so that her repertoire was varied and extensive. Lancelot, as he stood by, in enthusiastic admiration of her brilliancy of execution and exquisite taste, felt those new feelings of rapturous pleasure, that had been growing upon him for the past half hour, intensified as he recognized the truth that those past moments had not been without effect to Diane, as was confessed by her choosing as her piece "The Moonlight Sonata."

"I did not know you were musical," she said, slightly embarrassed, when his applause, delayed after that of the rest of the audience, was given in the few soft words, "You are so kind to have played *that*, Vaga Luna."

"Oh, Mr. Chauncey! how do you feel at that?" cried Mrs. Burnaby, overhearing what Diane said. "My dearest Miss Deshon, he will never forgive you, I should think! Have you not your violin, that you may show this ignorant young lady that you are her equal as a musician, Mr. Chauncey?"

Lancelot knew that on the violin he was as good a performer as Diane on the piano, and so did not disclaim Mrs. Burnaby's compli-

ment. He replied, "I hope I may believe that she is kindhearted enough to be so sorry for having wounded my unlucky feelings, that she will make up for it by one day allowing me to play to her accompaniment."

Before Diane could answer, Colonel Ross was saying, "Oh, Miss Deshon, don't betray your lamentable ignorance; Lance's fiddling is as world-famed as Joachim's."

"In fact," said Minnie, "it is not often that three such amateurs are together in a tiny country drawing-room, as Di, Miss Field, and Lance, and it is a great pity not to take advantage of our good fortune. Dear," to Diane, "don't go away; Miss Field only sang us a simple little song just now, because she doesn't play her own accompaniment in any of her grand bravuras. I wish you would play for her now."

"Please give me that book, Mrs. Burnaby," said Diane; then turning over her friend's music, she said, "Here is Gounod's 'Berceuse.' Will you not play the violin in this, Mr. Chauncey?"

But Miss Field objected; was "sick to death of it; every one hated that song now,"

&c., and was in a capricious mood; couldn't think why she had brought that book instead of another; was not in voice for this; didn't feel inclined to sing that, and so forth, and at last would only be prevailed upon to sing from memory a little, careless French duet with Diane.

Lancelot, with the rejected volume of music, retired to the end of the piano, to read the words of "Vaga Luna." When the ladies had finished singing, he approached Harriette, and, pointing to some writing on the title-page of one of the songs, asked, "Was this given to you?"

"I dare say," she replied; "a great many of the things in that book were presents. Which is it you mean?"

"It is this that made me ask," he said, indicating the writing, "Miss H. Field," and a date. "Do you mind telling me who gave it to you?"

"It is ten years ago; how can I recollect? I was quite a child. Stay, I believe I remember," she said, as if thinking, and in a slow voice. "A gentleman called Jones, an old gentleman with a wooden leg, gave it me; it

to his wife, I think," and she
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His queen had gained another
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all her guests had departed. "I
u have come back. I hope you
ve like a sensible man, and not go
ame, like you did the other day."
ean to be impertinent, and by a
nean 'blue devils,' Mistress Min.,
m you that you were mistaken,
intended to pay you a visitation
; I do now, in real earnest, if you
keep me."
ı indeed!" cried Minnie. "You
ıough you ever stayed any time at
I wish we could chain you up.
go into the sloppy, damp garden
wet poor Diane's feet must have
out there for hours and hours with

you! Oh, Fred! was there ever anything to compare with that man Deshon and Miss Field? How Di can stand it I can't think; why in the world they don't break off their engagement does surprise me so! Thank you. Good night."

For Lancelot had lighted a candle for his cousin, wishing to go once more into the garden, with Fred and a cigar for company, in lieu of Diane, to wonder what schoolboys in their calf love feel like when they look up at the lighted windows of the beloved one's dwelling, guessing behind which casement *she* reposes.

"Of course Alfred, for example, if he were alone there, would stand gazing at that window where the light was just extinguished—which very likely was that of Miss Field, or Gussie Deshon—and think all kinds of rubbish to himself," mused he. Now, it so happened that the window he noticed belonged to Diane's room, who lay in her bed at that very moment, the floor, the walls around her bathed in the moonlight, too much excited for sleep, far too unsettled and disturbed to think of reading.

"*Buona notte, O Luna di mi alma,*" Lancelot had whispered as he parted from Diane at her own door.

"Luna! And who, and where was, or did there exist his 'spirit's *sun*'?" she still pondered as the stars set and her pale namesake gave place to the bright summer dawn of morning.

CHAPTER VIII.

"How oft, when thou my musicke, musicke play'st
Upon that blessed wood whose motion sounds
With thy sweet fingers, when thou gently sway'st
The wiry concord that mine ear confounds,
Do I envie those jackes, that nimble leape
To kisse the tender inward of thy hand,
Whilst my poore lips, which should that harvest reape,
At the wood's bouldnesse by thee blushing stand!"

THOUGH Lancelot Chauncey was falling as deeply and surely in love as any member of his sex from the beginning of creation, and notwithstanding the strange happy novelty of the sensation, another interest shared his mind at this time in a very great degree, namely, the efforts that were being made to trace the friend of his boyhood, Lord Kildorin. Diane Deshon loved to listen to Minnie's numerous anecdotes of the youthful days of Lancelot,

and the wild Irish lads, and not a morning passed that she did not read the advertisement in the *Times*, about the missing "Kilian O'Lary, Viscount Kildorin," before pouring out the coffee at breakfast time. She looked in every chance newspaper that might be in her house, or in that of the Rosses', to see if it was inserted there, and frequently made speculations as to his appearance, and whether he was such a miserable victim of dissipation as his dead brother, whom she remembered having come across so often at the different gaming places she had visited abroad.

Of the mystery connected with the father's displeasure with his heir, and the sudden disappearance of the younger son, when his brother, disgraced for ever, was expelled from Sandhurst, and forbidden to enter the doors of his own home, she would have been willing to remain in unenlightened ignorance, rather than ask questions which she thought might be painful and embarrassing; but as the dark cloud which had fallen upon the family ten years ago had at that time, and until it was forgotten, been a public scandal, it was not very long before Diane knew, both from

Minnie's mouth and that of her newly acquired and more than devoted knight, Lancelot, that it was for no trivial offence against military discipline, no boyish escapade or insubordination, that the father's curse had been evoked, and that but for the skilful intervention of his friends, and the sacrifice of nearly the whole of the never large, and for generations mismanaged and squandered, fortune and estates, as the price of the fatal document, the unhappy young nobleman, instead of dragging out his ruined existence, attempting by excitement to find forgetfulness, might have died a convicted felon, in transportation, for the crime of forgery.

The stigma attaching to their name had, so was supposed, been more than Kilian, a boy of much spirit, and endowed with all his country's fine, exaggerated patriotism, could endure; and from the brief, excited words that could be remembered as having been spoken by him, before his sudden and complete disappearance, he seemed to believe—the earnest desire being the foundation and origin of his faith—that the resolution on his part not to be his brother's supplanter, and the threat that if

their father disowned and abandoned to his fate his elder son, he should find himself utterly childless, would induce Lord Kildorin to relent in his severity.

This rash and overstrained heroism of a boy of eighteen, however, made a little halo round him, in the mind of Diane, who tried to imbue Miss Field with a like feeling of interest. But that fair lady was too much occupied with her own little day-dream, and scheme for worldly advancement, to do more than rally her friend concerning the marvellous impression this Lord Kildorin had made upon her, before she had ever beheld him; and a neatly barbed little arrow of sarcasm was launched, in the anxiety and pity she professed to entertain for poor Mr. Deshon, if his bride should set up a second *cavalier servente*, in addition to Mr. Chauncey.

All the dormant sluggishness of her nature was roused and altered now, though Diane was scarcely yet awake to the knowledge that marriage with her cousin would be a sin and misery to her. Now her life seemed so full of being, each moment of her days was fraught with the new, strange interest, so strongly felt, so additionally powerful and absorbing from

the fact of her having grown to womanhood, with all its strength of passions and emotion, without having previously experienced any of those "touches," which are "but embassies of love, to tamper with the feelings ere he find empire for life." Many have averred that the human heart is capable of loving perfectly twice, thrice, and even several times during a life, but that on retrospection there is always the tender, green spot of a *first* love, though later ones may have been happier, wiser, deeper, and more enduring.

As the fair summer days of this his first love glided speedily away, Lancelot often asked himself what would be the result of the bright, sweet incident in his life, and what effect it would have upon him when all should be over and he must not, could not, for the sake of his own happiness, see Diane so constantly as he was now in the habit of doing; for the families at Thamis Cottage and Riverbank had become almost like one household, living, as they did, generally out of doors, on the river, or under the trees in either of the pleasant, shady gardens, or, when the sun made the open air too hot, there was music to occupy their hours,

Diane and Lancelot at the piano, in one house, practising steadily and perseveringly, each with a true artist's love and delight in the science; Miss Field making merely a pretence to sing, and rarely letting her voice clash in discord with the classical strains close by, played her game, growing more and more confident, day by day, that the work would soon be done—that Diane, wholly won by Lancelot, would demand her release from Gussie, who would, only too willingly, accept his dismissal, and bestow his hand where his heart had already strayed.

But Harriette was mistaken. Diane, though changed and unsettled by the new intimacy, though there was for her a companionship in Lancelot's society, such as she could never have imagined possible to exist between man and woman, and while she was conscious of a longing wish that between herself and the man she was to marry before many months were over, there could be the great sympathy of tastes, the almost friendship, that she and this fresh acquaintance seemed to have formed already, yet, when she questioned her own heart as to whether "if she were not engaged,

and if she were that sort of person, and if he were in love with her," with a few more "ifs," she would love him, always insisted on dismissing the idea, as utterly silly and unworthy of one who had lived to the age of two-and-twenty without any such absurdity; called to mind every disparaging word she had heard from Mrs. Ross about her cousin's heartlessness and love of amusing himself, and compelled herself into the belief that she, being forewarned, was forearmed, and safe from danger of "the cruel madness of love," and that no harm could come by allowing things simply to take their chance, which, in other words, meant listening to Lancelot Chauncey's compliments and delighting in them, and permitting his attentions thoroughly to take the place of poor Alfred's devotion, who, about three days after Minnie's dinner-party, had arrived at Riverbank, in a great state of mind, to say "that it was the most hateful bother in the world, Miss Deshon, but mother had got some people to come and stay in the house, and had told him he really must be more at home than he had been lately."

"We shall miss you dreadfully," Diane had

said kindly, "and if 'The Minnehaha' upsets, I shall say it is because you are not there to pick me out of the river."

"It's awfully good-natured of you to say so, but I'm not such an ass as to suppose I'm any good to you, especially now you've got Chauncey," he added rather dolefully.

"But of course we shall see something of you occasionally, Alfred," said Mrs. Ross, from the other side of the garden hedge. "Your visitors are sure to want to see Teddington Lock, and we shall meet on the river, you know."

"That's just the —— worst of it; I must row them about, and one of them is a nun, and I shan't know a bit what to talk to her about."

"Good Heavens!" cried Colonel Ross. "Give my love to your mother, Alfred, and say I expect to be invited to meet her '*lionne religieuse.*'"

"Mother says she's an awfully jolly woman," replied Alfred. "She isn't exactly a nun, you know, and she dresses all right, except when she is on duty; she is a sort of lay sister, not a Roman Catholic, and she's called Miss

Carlton, you know, not Sister something-or-other."

The lad was missed when his daily visits were discontinued, for they were all fond of him; and by no one was his absence more regretted than by Lancelot Chauncey, who felt that, when Alfred was present, it was so easy to amuse Diane by talking pleasant nonsense, and half in fun, half earnest, to bow the knee before Queen Luna's throne, with no dread of fatal consequences. But the discovery that Miss Field did not want the Riverbank piano in the morning, and that it was a far finer instrument than that at Thamis Cottage, having induced Mr. Chauncey to request that their practisings might take place in Diane's drawing-room, Harriette and Gussie keeping out of the way, and Mrs. Deshon never making her appearance downstairs before luncheon time, Lancelot feared that his uncontrollable feelings, becoming too much for management, would betray him into a confession of his love to this girl, whom he could not hope capable of returning the affection of such an one as himself.

For love, and more especially first love, is

very humble. Had he been less thoroughly taken out of himself and improved by his admiration and regard for her, Lancelot's vanity, as well as his common sense, would have assured him that a young and inexperienced girl does not receive the incessant homage and attention of a popular, accomplished man of the world, day after day, with perfect indifference, nor can she lose that hourly worship without experiencing a sensation of desertion and loneliness; and he might have satisfied himself that the difference between his own behaviour towards her and that of Gussie, whom he wellnigh hated for standing in the relation he did to Diane, must have taught her that, although her *fiancé* was not worth loving, the world was not devoid of those to whom it would be possible to render up her fresh and untried heart.

To patiently wait, until by the warmth of his own passion he had persevered in kindling ever so small a spark in her breast, was not the work to which he applied himself: all his mental energies were strained to the attempt of concealing from her, more even than from the others, the knowledge of his love.

If Diane had not been Diane, the task would have been more difficult, nay, it would have been impossible, he thought to himself one hot morning, as he stood in the half-darkened room, which, with its purple fittings and the fragrant flower-laden air wafted in through the windows, always made him feel as though he were in some enchanted, fairy place, by Diane's side at the piano, watching her small, blue-veined hands, that seemed too slight and frail to bring out such a brilliant power of harmony and sound from the keys, which he half envied for the lingering tender way her fingers glided over them, when trying to follow Lancelot's improvisings.

"You are the most unselfish person in the world to allow me to come in and bore you with my fiddling in this way, morning after morning, Miss Deshon," said he, putting down his violin; "but I wish I knew if your cousin keeps out of the room only because he is not fond of music, or if it is that he is annoyed at your allowing yourself to be so monopolized."

"Oh! indeed no, he does not think anything about that, and he is very fond of music

sometimes, only—— I hope you are not vexed: I mean, do your words imply that you think Gussie is impolite to neglect you when you come? You know he thinks your visits are to *me*, because I play for you, and he has really no intention of being rude."

"How can you think for a moment that anything so absurd was in my thoughts? I don't want him: I don't want anybody but you. You know I would rather talk to you than any one in the world."

"But you come here to practise, not to talk," said Diane, striking some very vigorous chords as she spoke.

"We have played for half an hour, and it is too hot for so much exertion. Let us talk now, please, unless you prefer to send me away. If I bore you, tell me to go."

"You do not bore me in the least; and if you choose, you can be useful, and help me to cut some flowers," said Diane, rising from the piano to avoid the eyes whose earnest gaze tried to fix her own. "How he flirts," was her inward comment. "I wonder if all flirts are as nice as he is?" and Lancelot, because she was so free from all coquetry, and because

her cool, fair cheeks did not flame into scarlet at everything he said, thought, "How cold, how incapable of feeling, is this girl! I wonder if she will ever love at all."

"But how can Deshon deny himself your society in the way he does?" continued he, following Diane into the garden with a basket and huge pair of scissors. "If I who am nothing to you find such a charm in being in your company, what can your presence be to him whose betrothed wife you are?"

"How can I answer that? It is rather like a sum in Rule of Three, and I am frightfully stupid about arithmetic."

Her voice came softly upon his ears, but her form was lost in a large bush of syringa. Was he mad this morning, he wondered, that he could not keep from thus treading on perilous ground? Was there a spell upon him, forcing him to lay bare his heart before her?

When only a small standard rose-tree was between them, and he took the scissors out of her hands, lest she should tear them in briars, his last question was repeated.

"He is unkind to teaze me," she thought. "It cannot be that he despises me for being

about to make a *marriage de convenance.* Ah no! he is too worldly-minded really to care for that. But he is silly to flirt so much with one who knows the world as I do, and is not taken in at all by the nonsense he talks!"

"What can it feel like, I wonder, to be loved by you, Luna?"

"I do not love myself, so I cannot tell. I must have some more syringa, please. Can you reach that large bough? I am so very fond of it."

"So am I," said Lancelot, who was no great botanist, and was not certain that he had ever noticed it before, and thought it smelt rather like cucumber.

"Harriette wore some in a great wreath in her hair last night, and she was dressed in white, and Gussie thought it was orange blossom, and wanted to have a tableau of a wedding after dinner."

"Luckily enough for him, Riverbank is not in Scotland, or he would have been a married man by this time. But *we* are safe; there are no witnesses here. May I put this by your hair, and see if the same delusion takes possession of my mind? You have a white gown too."

He held the bough he had just broken off above her head, saying, "I, Lancelot, take thee, Luna, to love, honour, and obey, till death us do part. Will you let me?"

"Yes, yes," she cried, with a startled laugh; "of course I will let you *obey* me. Command the first—bring my flowers indoors, or the sun will wither them."

"Are they to be put in water?"

"No; I am going to pack them in this cardboard box, and send them to Lady Cockburn. Poor thing! she has been ill with fearful neuralgia, and will not come to me until she is better. What is that air?" said Diane, looking up from the flowers which she was spreading out before her, as Lancelot, taking her place at the piano, played softly little bits of different songs. He answered her by throwing all his power of feeling, his whole heart, into Felicien David's beautiful song, "O, ma maitresse; O, mes amours!" and a severer critic than the little lady he addressed might have declared the same opinion that Diane's eyes expressed, that his singing was exquisite; for, though a very fine voice was not one of his gifts, he could sometimes afford more true

pleasure by his tasteful, artistic rendering of vocal music, than it is often in the power of those possessed of superior organs to bestow.

She came over, nearer to the piano, as he continued singing; and standing there, listening, with downcast eyes and pale cheeks, the truth asserted itself, and she owned to her heart that she was learning to love this man.

"'Si tu savais comme je t'aime,
Bien sûr toi même tu m'aimerais——'"

Lancelot broke off abruptly, saying, "I want my answer—the answer to what I asked you just now: or, rather tell me what you feel like towards the man you love."

"Mr. Chauncey! you know I do not love—— You are uncivil and cruel!" Then no sooner had she spoken them, than she wished the words unsaid.

"I wish I could understand you," Lancelot said after a pause. "Tell me what you mean by my being cruel? Uncivil, I grant I was—impertinent. It seems to have been my fate to annoy you, ever since I have known you. Luna, Luna, your eyes are full of tears! I have affronted you! Forgive me, I implore you!"

"Please write Lady Cockburn's address on that box for me, and don't talk silly nonsense about my eyes being full of such absurd things as tears," Diane said quickly, as she placed pen and ink beside him.

It was true that her eyes had been very rainy for a moment, but pride quickly dried them, and enabled her coolly to talk to the man who, by his cousin's own showing, "was for ever making love, without any truth in it."

"I have managed to write the address, but there is scarcely a drop of ink in the bottle," Lancelot said, wiping the pen.

"How stupid of me to have forgotten to have it filled," said Diane. "Do you know, such a tiresome thing happened about that inkstand last week. Miss Field had been writing a roulade at the end of one of her songs, in that volume she brought to Minnie's when we dined there, and she left the book open on the writing-table, and we went out on the river, and when we came in again we found the inkstand upset over the page that was open."

"So her roulade was spoiled, I suppose?"

"No, luckily not; she had dried that, and I

suppose her sleeve had accidentally turned over the pages, for when we came to discover the damage, the book was open at another place; the blot was on the title-page of a song, that one about which you asked her, and she said had been given her by a gentleman with a wooden leg."

"I remember the writing on it struck me as being like some I knew; but other people write backwards besides the O'Larys," said Lancelot, taking up his hat to depart. "May I take one flower—a bit of this counterfeit orange blossom? Thank you; then au revoir, this afternoon," and for the time being, that is to say, until he should be with her again, he thought he was safe, and his love still unsuspected. But how long it might continue so he could not feel sure; an excursion had been arranged for that afternoon, and, if he were not very, very careful, might not his rebel tongue and feelings lead him into the trouble he so strove to guard against?

CHAPTER IX.

"Oh, what is Love that poorly counts the cost?
I have exchanged my calm for a great storm,
In which perhaps I shall be crush'd and lost,
And yet not therefore any wish I form
Again to sink into the autumn frost
And misty dimness of old apathy."

On the broad window-seat of one of the state apartments at Hampton Court Palace sat Miss Deshon and Mr. Chauncey that afternoon, looking down on the stiff yew avenues and gaudy flower beds, listening to the military band that was playing in the garden below them. They were waiting for Colonel and Mrs. Ross, who had gone to call upon their friend, the old Lady Emily Despencer, and had arranged to return and join them there, when they had paid their visit.

Miss Field and Gussie, who had driven in

the latter's dog-cart, were sauntering about the grounds alone, much to the contempt and disgust of Minnie, who, warm in her dislikes as in her affections, was beginning to feel a perfect hatred for Mr. Deshon on account of his utter neglect of Diane.

"If he gave her up altogether, and was not such a horrid dog in the manger, I shouldn't mind," she said to her husband very often; "but he keeps the poor little thing from marrying any one else, and yet leaves her to run the risk of falling in love—for don't tell me she *can't* love: I know she could—and a girl doesn't have Lancey dangling about her from morning till night, with impunity, worse luck! Next year, when she is married and sees more of the world, you see if Di isn't miserable—or gone to the bad!"

No people are happily married themselves without acquiring a little of the matchmaking element in their dispositions; and Colonel Ross, who did not take such a hopeless view of the character of his wife's cousin as did Minnie herself, had looked forward for some days to the time when Miss Deshon should give her *fiancé* his *congé*, and appoint Lancelot his successor.

He had not felt sure but that there was some understanding between them already when, as the carriage drove through Bushey Park, Diane's parasol was lifted a little from her face, and two eyes glinted at Mr. Chauncey for a moment from beneath the long fringe. Some irresistible impulse had made the girl look to see whether Lancelot had forgotten that morning after Mrs. Burnaby's ball, and she would have experienced a sensation of disappointment had not an answering glance told her that he also was thinking of their conversation under the chestnut tree. Yet she felt she had been wrong in letting him see that she remembered it. Now that she knew this man was to her what no other had been before, such as she had believed it utterly impossible for any one to become, her anger and horror at herself for having, unasked, given her love was intense.

Unsolicited, did she deem it—unsought? Had not his every word and action for the past fortnight been expressive of his veneration—a pleading for some, if only the slightest, return of love? But she had no sense to discriminate between true passion and its counter-

feit; and, judging by her own cousin, whom she had seen more times than she could remember apparently just as much captivated as he now seemed to be with Miss Field—thinking of the courts Lady Cockburn used to hold, and the compliments and flattery of her numerous adorers, some of which Diane used to overhear, some repeated for her edification by Margaretta, in her boundless vanity—she only believed Lancelot's manner to be that of the world, and blamed and took herself to task severely for the effect it had upon her.

There is plenty to think of and talk about at Hampton Court, especially at a first visit; and Diane, having never been there before, was much interested in looking at the pictures; but the rooms were rather crowded, and the weather hot and exhausting, so that Minnie, on leaving her with him, gave strict orders to Lancelot that Miss Deshon was to rest until she and Fred returned.

"I do not seem to have seen half enough," said Diane, leaning her head against the dark shutter, unconscious that her perfect, refined style of beauty and tasteful dress were attracting some notice and admiration, and that

people passed her slowly, more than once calling their companions to notice the lovely, foreign-looking girl sitting by the tall man in the window.

"It is an interesting old place, and I wonder we don't come here oftener," said Lancelot, after a pause. "Let me row you and Minnie up one morning, and then lunch at 'The Mitre'; you do not know the river between this and Teddington."

"Would it be too far for me to paddle?"

"Oh yes. I am sorry to say anything disparaging about your picturesque little craft, or your management of it, but you do not get along very quickly in your light Cheemaun, though you look so charming in it. Yet you would look quite as pretty in the stern of Fred's boat."

"Do you think it is of importance with me how I look? I did not know you considered me a vain person," said Diane.

"Nor do I. My words were simply idiotic, for I know no one with so little vanity as la bella Luna, nor any one upon whom compliments are so thoroughly wasted," Lancelot added.

"Is that meant as praise, or the reverse?"

"It is a laudable quality, I think, indifference to flattery—still, it is no flattery to tell you you are beautiful; your looking-glass must assure you that you have a perfect face. You are almost perfect; you have but one fault, at least in my eyes."

Diane looked up at him wistfully and inquiringly, and he went on,

"It is utter presumption on my part to speak thus to you, but I am older than yourself."

"Five years," put in Diane parenthetically.

"And you have been so kind to me, have allowed me to think that you do not dislike me, and to hope that my acquaintance with you may one day become friendship, even if it is not such already. As one who is more interested in you and in your happiness than you can understand, I ask your permission to——"

"To abuse me about my engagement again," she said, the colour suffusing her cheeks, but without anger, and casting down her eyes.

"No, no; you know best your reasons for marrying your cousin, and I have no right to judge as to their propriety."

"But tell me what this fault is, that I may try and amend it." So spoke Diane, thinking, "He most likely believes that I am flirting, as well as himself."

There was an attempt at gaiety in her voice, which, as he was looking far away from her, over the trees in the Home Park, and did not see the quiver of the lips that accompanied her words, deceived him.

"Your fault," he said, speaking hurriedly and hoarsely, "is one for which, were I a better man myself, I should have more right to condemn you; as it is, I scarcely ought to blame you, though, to all ideas, it amounts nearly to a crime in a woman. You are utterly and thoroughly without heart!"

"Oh, Mr. Chauncey! how can you say so unkind a thing about me?"

"Of course I do not mean that you are like the Roman ladies, who turned up their thumbs, and smilingly witnessed the death of the gladiators. You would not hurt a spider or a gnat, I believe, and you have a depth of affection for your friends, your aunt, your horse, and babies, and birds, and such like; but you are totally incapable of the strong, undying

love every true woman should possess, to make her nature complete. Oh, Miss Deshon," he continued, still without looking at her, "for every man in God's world He has created a tender, guardian spirit, to be his friend and solace, his rescue and salvation, by her love for him. I do not believe that any man yet came to destruction, but that he might have been saved, had Providence thrown that woman in his way. But *you*—should one throw his whole heart's affection at your feet, you could not influence him, you could not guide him, because you have it not in you to love him."

Diane answered breathlessly, frightened at his vehemence, and not understanding that the victim he spoke of was before her, having fallen through the ice of her reserve, to struggle in the still, cold waters of her exquisite fascination, "If I have not the power of feeling a grand passion, I should think no one would think it worth while to experience one for me."

"I do not know that. Women like you have been men's damnation ere this. When your sweet beauty and gentle ways have inspired some luckless wretch with a love for you——"

"Oh, hush! Mr. Chauncey; I will not listen to you any longer. I am very, very sorry that you—that any one should accuse me of heartlessness, and I must plead the way in which I have for ever lived as an apology for being such a worldly, unsentimental person," she said. "I have never had any opportunity of 'falling in love,' as it is called. I have never been intimate with any one—any man, I mean—and I have known for such a long time that I should marry Gussie, and I think it is impossible to attain to your 'grand passion' with one whom you have known for a lifetime. Why, Gussie was only three years old when I was born, and we played and quarrelled together, like a little brother and sister, exactly. Gussie used often to pinch me; and I can well remember biting him, for pulling the feathers out of my parrot's tail."

Of course it will be decided that Diane was very wrong in allowing a man, with whom she was so deeply captivated, against all warning and better judgment, to talk to her in such a manner as the above; and, moreover, that to excuse herself was most weak and faulty.

Lancelot, as usual, thinking he had said too much, and that she was inwardly laughing at him and triumphing in her conquest, endeavoured to recant, saying,

"What a stupid lubber you must vote me, Luna, for railing against you with all that rubbish! What am I, you might ask, that I should lecture you against worldly-mindedness?"

"I confess," said Diane, "that those sentiments startled me, coming from one so proverbially a man of the world as Mr. Chauncey."

"What do you know of me?" he asked brusquely.

"Not a great deal, by hearsay. I know very few of your friends. Harriette and Gussie are mere acquaintances, whilst Colonel Ross and Minnie are too fond of you to say anything disagreeable about you, as your rather fierce expression of countenance would seem to anticipate."

"Then you know nothing to my discredit?" he asked. "Minnie has not said anything hard of me?"

"Only pretty much the same as you said of me just now; but she is not so violent. She

frequently says that you have never been in love, and don't seem capable of 'a grand passion.'"

"The dear little woman contradicts herself occasionally, for, do you know, she informed me at luncheon time that I was a noble creature, with a splendid heart, if I only knew it, and pictured me with a charming wife and family. That was simply because my little godchild, who is in the habit of refusing to eat her dinner, devoured a whole cutlet from my plate."

"When I hear of your having received that reward of merit," said Diane, "I shall remember this day, this view, and"—as the band, which had been playing a selection of Irish airs, came to "Love's young dream"—"I shall think of that music!"

"Will you think of this day—this conversation? But you will never have reason; if I ever married, it would only be as servants leave their places, 'to better myself.' A love match is a great mistake. I have known fellows bored to death by the demonstrative adoration of their tender helpmeets, and a poor sub in the Life Guards, with only a few hundreds of

his own, cannot think of marriage unless it is with money; and money goes where it can do better for itself—small blame to it."

Colonel and Mrs. Ross were approaching as Lancelot spoke these last words.

"We have seen the others; they have gone to 'The Mitre,' where your cousin has ordered the carriages to pick us up in an hour's time," said Minnie. "Are you too tired to go as far as the terrace walk by the river, Di?—the view is so pretty."

Diane disclaimed any feelings of fatigue, so accordingly they went downstairs, and out into the grounds.

"There is that incessant little dusty widow again; I wonder what is the matter with her?" said Colonel Ross, as they sauntered along slowly.

"She looks as though she had missed her party, and didn't know how to get home," said Lancelot, glancing without much interest at a small, middle-aged lady, with a tired, flushed face, who appeared too much excited to care that the long train of her handsome crape gown had become frayed and soiled by dragging on the gravel walks. She passed them but

slowly, and in a few moments turned and again met them as though inclined to speak, then, changing her mind, she turned down a side path, and in a few minutes was out of sight.

On arriving at "The Mitre Hotel" they were greeted by Miss Field's handsome face looking from the bow window upstairs, where she and Gussie sat in graceful seclusion behind the curtains, hidden from the other occupants of the apartment, who were a tired and hungry party of excursionists, and for whom a table was laid in readiness for dinner.

"We couldn't get a private room, so we thought it better to come here than go home tealess," said Harriette, when the others joined them. "I felt so dreadfully thirsty, that driving back unrefreshed I knew would be martyrdom. Mr. Deshon suggested Badminton at 'The Greyhound,' but I have a sort of idea that this is the hotel people always come to at Hampton Court. Dear Mrs. Ross, you look so tired, and Diane is pale as a ghost."

"I am much more hungry than tired," said Minnie, as a waiter brought in the tea. "I declare it will take a dozen people to lift this

enormous teapot; do help me, Fred. Lance, what are you about? Diane has put ten pieces of sugar into your cup!"

"Only seven—one more than she took herself," said Lancelot quietly, and the chances are that, had Minnie not remarked him, he would have held his cup a great deal longer for the pleasure of being ministered to by Diane.

"How nasty those peoples' soup smells, and how quiet they are! they must be very hungry," said Harriette, sipping her tea behind the curtain. "I am so glad I'm not with them. Don't you feel grateful sometimes that you are not any one else?"

"Yes, and especially so *now*," Gussie said softly, and coming very near to her, to the amusement and envy of two Lancer cornets, who were smoking their cigars on the steps of the hotel.

The gentleman at the head of the dinner table had just helped himself to a second supply of the soup which had offended Miss Field's olfactory sense, when the door opened and admitted the dusty little lady in black whom the Rosses had noticed a short while since in the Palace gardens.

"Come, Mrs. Carewe," said the gentleman, "you won't have time to eat your dinner before the train starts if you don't look sharp. You see we obeyed you, and didn't wait. James, give your cousin a glass of sherry wine—she looks heated."

Harriette Field held back the curtain, and gazed intently at the lady, with her thin lips drawn firmly together, and Gussie's low, tender speeches fell on listless, half dead ears.

The carriages were at the door, and Minnie and Diane had risen from the table. Miss Field's hat and gloves were on a sideboard at the other end of the room; she emerged from her retired position, and, with Gussie ever in attendance, walked over to a mirror above the chimney-piece, to prepare for the drive home.

The lady who had been addressed as "Mrs. Carewe" then let her spoon drop into her soup, thereby splashing her bonnet-strings and the face of the gentleman sitting next her, and, hastily rising, advanced with outstretched hands to Miss Field, exclaiming, "Harriette, Harriette, I thought I could not be wrong! I saw you in the gardens an hour ago, and then somehow missed you, and have hurried

through every path and avenue to try and speak to you—my dear dead sister's only child!"

"I am glad to see you after all these years, Aunt Lucy," Harriette replied coldly. "I had not an idea that you were in England. It is some time since we—parted."

"Was that parting *my* fault, poor girl?"

"We need not go into that. I shall see you again, I suppose, and then we will rake up all old grievances, unless you think 'least said's soonest mended.' Who are all these people with you?"

"Relatives of my dear husband's; we came from Australia together last month; *monied* people, dearest. And your friends, love? What are you doing?"

"Living down the past, and flourishing like a green bay-tree, and——" All this had been said in a low voice, but Harriette whispered her last words, "I am thinking of marrying."

"Harrie! You could——"

"Hush! other women besides yourself meet with bereavements. Though I am not in weeds—which, by the way, suit you admirably—my incubus is removed."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Mrs. Carewe, with clasped hands.

"For shame! Is that how you received the news of my respected psalm-singing uncle's death? But I suppose his last sainted breath was drawn in the presence of his devoted wife. Now *don't* cry. I beg your pardon, dear: I know you were fond and proud of him. Tell me where you are living, for I must be off now. I will come and see you to-morrow."

"Albemarle Street, No. —. Come to me as early as possible, as I go to Sydenham with the Lloyds at two o'clock."

"I will be with you by twelve: now go and eat your dinner. Your relations—who look Australian to the backbone—are not regarding me with delighted countenances. Good-bye! What, do you want to kiss me?"

She stooped and embraced the little woman, with a softer expression and something of melancholy in her face, and then joined Gussie, who waited for her at the door: the rest, in Diane's barouche, had already driven off.

She talked to them of Mrs. Carewe that evening, mentioning her promise of going to see her the following day, adding, "I really

have behaved shamefully to her. She became quite like a mother when mamma died and papa married his second wife, with whom I never got on well; and then I utterly dropped her, and never wrote to her or anything. But then, she was married to a dreadful Plymouth Brother, and they went out to Australia, and it is so dreadful to have to own relationship with people who are colonial, and dissenting into the bargain; the two things are quite bad enough separately, but taken together perfectly insupportable."

At Thamis Cottage, too, the incident of the meeting between aunt and niece was a topic of conversation and some little interest.

"I never saw anything like the scared, blanched look that came into her face when that lady spoke to her," said Minnie. "There is something queer about the girl, depend upon it. Who is she? Mrs. Burnaby only knows her through a common friend, and she always gives me the notion of not being exactly what she pretends."

"The Fields are very well known down at Dover," said Lancelot. "I dare say she was annoyed at having her *tête-à-tête* with Deshon

interrupted for such a long time; she seems to prefer his sweet society to anything else in the world, just now."

He meant to satisfy any suspicion that might be in Minnie's mind, yet, though he could not form any definite cause of apprehension, he knew that it would be a relief to him to learn that Harriette Field would not long continue an inmate of Diane's house, and that he mistrusted and disliked her extremely.

CHAPTER X.

"Her brother is coming back to-night,
Breaking up my dream of delight."

"No, no; Di doesn't tell it like that; you can't tell stories so nice as Di!"

This remonstrance came from the lips of little Norah Ross, and was addressed to her cousin, Mr. Chauncey, who, endeavouring to relate in language and style suitable to the comprehension of a young lady of the advanced age of four years, had failed to render either interesting or intelligible the pathetic history of "The Lily Maid of Astolat." Eveleen, a year younger than her sister, and not feeling the same attraction for Doré's illustrations of the Laureate's works, was pressing forward the superior charms of

Mother Hubbard in a yellow petticoat and crimson panier, with a lean flesh-coloured dog, and would in all probability have gained her point, and banished the volume of Doré, had it not been for Norah's mention of Diane's name; but Lancelot, though fearful even to ask his pretty little fluffy-haired, satin-skinned cousins the simple question as to what was Miss Deshon's version of Elaine's story, lest their father, lying on the sofa at the other end of the room, and apparently totally engrossed in the perusal of that morning's *Times*, should suspect (as if he were not already perfectly aware of it) the magic interest with which that allusion to Diane had suddenly imbued the occupation of amusing the children, began his story-telling again with, "There was once upon a time an old gentleman called Sir Bernard, and he lived in a castle, and had a pretty daughter whose name was Elaine," when Colonel Ross, putting down his newspaper, said with a laugh,

"You haven't got the right sort of way, Lance. 'The Idylls,' as told by Miss Deshon, are calculated to delight the infant mind, but I fear in your language they will fail to be

comprehensible. I wish you could have been listening, as I did yesterday afternoon, just before we went to Hampton Court. Miss Deshon, with the baby on her lap, and Norah and Evy holding up Doré before her, was weaving the weirdest romances out of the pictures; it was so pretty to hear her, and see her sweet little face, with the deep earnest eyes, as she crooned out, 'and so this brave, brave, handsome man, who was called the same name as baby—' Aha! Mr. Twentystone, *you* enjoyed it every bit as much as your sisters, I believe!"

Mr. Lancelot Ross, alias Twentystone, a large placid infant, who had been for some time endeavouring, by clawing feebly at the sleeve of his father's coat, to struggle on to his feet, here suddenly collapsed into a sitting posture, and enduring the signal failure of his attempt with stoical resignation, sat and sucked his thumbs in contented baby dignity, whilst Fred went on,

"Sir Lancelot was painted in glowing terms, and endowed with more than every possible virtue under the sun, of course. Young ladies don't see in him merely the muscular scoundrel

he undoubtedly was (if he ever existed), and The Maid of Astolat—ah, Miss Deshon, I was telling Chauncey of my eavesdropping yesterday."

"When you laughed at me for pitying poor Elaine. Fancy, Mr. Chauncey, Colonel Ross would have me believe that people of the present day despise The Lily Maid!"

"But you know you do, yourself," said Lancelot, "that is, you don't believe a girl would ever make such a fool of herself as to die for love of a man who didn't care two pins about her."

"Then Sir Lancelot was *such* a man!" Diane cried, looking no lily maid herself just then, for a rare and very lovely pink blush had been deepening on her cheeks ever since her entrance. Baby crawled towards her, and grunted a demand to be taken notice of, which hid the great confusion she felt just after her little burst of enthusiasm about the Flower of Chivalry, and Norah and Eveleen, dismissing Lancelot's services now that one of far more efficient story-telling ability had arrived, clung to her, with petitions that she would "go on with the pictures."

"Run and ask mamma, then, if you may come with me, and I dare say Aunt Maggie will tell you 'Catskin,' or, 'The teeny tiny woman,'" said Diane, and the children, having had pleasant experience of Mrs. Deshon's petting and French bonbons, scampered away to find Minnie, and obtain the required permission, whilst Diane continued to Fred, "I came in this morning because I have heard from my cousin that she is coming to me to-day, to spend a week, and I want you all to be kind to me, and help to make Ettie's first impressions of Teddington favourable."

"I hope Lady Cockburn is better," said Lancelot.

"She writes that her neuralgic attacks last for a few minutes less every day, so I hope that, with change of air, and the perfect rest of Riverbank, she will be quite well in a day or two. Ah! here she is," as Mrs. Ross appeared on the scene. "Minnie, will you do me a favour, and come to dinner this evening? *Please* don't refuse me."

"What, all of us? and will you be bothered by the children, now, into the bargain?"

"Yes, let me have them; I have nothing to

do, and am all by myself, for Harrie and Gussie have gone to London. You will come this evening, won't you? Margaretta arrives to-day, and she does so hate a house full of her own sex; and if Harrie's aunt comes back with her, as she possibly may, we shall be five women, and only Gussie, at dinner."

"And if I came, there would be six," said Minnie.

"Ah, but you would bring Colonel Ross and Mr. Chauncey!" Diane argued.

"In fact, my dear, it is my men kind you want, and I am endured for their valuable sakes. Well, you are welcome to Lancelot, of course; but, as this is Fred's last day here, I can't be so magnanimous as to spare him to you, without myself, and so we will all come."

"Are you really going away to-morrow, Colonel Ross?" said Diane. "Oh, how dreadfully we shall miss you! I am so very, very sorry."

Lancelot wondered how the news of his departure would be taken by her were he going. He could not fail to see that she liked his society fairly well, and he thought that an expression of disappointment one-third as great

as that she had just spoken to Fred, must draw from him an appeal to be allowed to stay for ever with her. But, ere the fancy of her surprise, or probable displeasure, at an avowal of his love, had time to spring thoroughly into being, he was recalled by Diane's soft voice continuing, "Every one goes away; first of all, Alfred, who appears thoroughly happy and contented with the people he abused so much for coming and taking him away from us; now Colonel Ross, and I suppose Mr. Chauncey will be off soon."

She spoke so calmly, with such a placid smile and so unchanging a complexion, that even Mrs. Ross was deceived, and thought she must have been mistaken in thinking, was disappointed in the hope that Diane was beginning to care for Lancelot. Before she could reply that it was not her intention to allow her cousin to depart for ever so long, Lancelot was saying, "I believe I shall be here till the Ryde regatta—if Minnie doesn't turn me out. That will be next week——"

"You said you had refused Lord Lonville," broke in Minnie. "What stories you tell, you good-for-nothing fellow!"

He had declined his friend's invitation a fortnight ago, but he knew that he would be welcome at any time he sent word that he wished to join the crew of the yacht Stella. Diane, with a throb at her heart, which angered her sorely, was glad that the baby was still in her arms, for in prattling with him she had an excuse for not joining in the conversation. Without noticing Minnie's last words, Lancelot presently said, "Miss Deshon, that hopeful heir of the Ross house hold is far too fine a specimen of humanity for you to nurse; give him to me. Come, then, youngster!"

"Ingrate! Like the rest of your sex, Master Lancelot, only too delighted to go away to a fresh person—fickle baby," laughed Diane, her arms by no means sorry to be rid of their heavy burden. "Then, dearest Minnie, it is promised that you come to dinner, so I leave you now; here are Norah and Evy."

"You'll take the children's nursery governess too, won't you, Miss Deshon?" pleaded Lancelot, with the feeling that somehow Lady Cockburn's presence would make

a difference in the blissful, dreamy life at Teddington, and, though he knew it was only like a continued course of poison-taking or dram-drinking, to put himself so unguardedly and recklessly in the way of Diane, he could not resist this last quiet morning with her.

"Nursery governess, indeed! My youngest child, I think," said Minnie, as she watched them go away together, not knowing whether she most longed or dreaded to believe that he was "hit" for the first time in his life.

A suspicion in Mrs. Ross's mind that Lady Cockburn's arrival was a subject of anxiety, and not unmixed pleasure, to her cousin, was entirely dispelled when Minnie saw them together that evening, for Margaretta, though looking drawn and jaded from the pain she had been suffering for some days past, was in her most fascinating humour, bent with no apparent effort upon charming them all with her brilliancy; tender and affectionate in her manner towards her mother and Diane, concealing the objection she had to Miss Field, as a visitor at Diane's house, though, with admirably acted blindness, she failed to see that it had grown into a custom to permit the lady

and her brother to entertain each other exclusively; expressing nothing but delight, instead of the surprise and consternation with which she perceived Lancelot's intimacy with her cousin, and, as far as Colonel and Mrs. Ross were concerned, succeeding perfectly in establishing her reputation as an enchanting woman.

But Harriette, though she had only that day assured Mrs. Carewe that she was almost certain of becoming Gussie Deshon's wife before very long, felt, when the evening was over, that underneath that gushing, enthusiastic demeanour, which Lady Cockburn could so admirably assume, when it suited her convenience, there was a power of will and suasion, as regarded her relations, that would do much to guide Gussie from the dangerous and deceitful path he had been treading, and prevent him from saying the irrevocable words which she had believed were so nearly spoken.

And Lancelot, as he walked home beside the Rosses, and listened to their eulogiums on the lovely eyes and hair, artistic costume, and gracious sparkling vivacity of Lady Cockburn, was thinking that she was but a hag-

gard, showily-dressed woman, with the voice of a screech-owl, who had come down there to disturb the even serenity of Diane's life, and to discover, and mock at, the secret of his love.

He might have been justified in his opinion could he have penetrated the blind behind which the light burnt, till a late hour, in the room he now knew for Diane's, as he walked irresolutely about the garden, trying to make up his mind to the wrench it would require to say good-bye immediately, and go away, never to see her until she should be either Gussie's wife, or free for him to try and win her.

With a flushed face, as, with handkerchief steeped in laudanum, she endeavoured to alleviate the racking agony that had been half maddening her during the evening, though concealed, with almost Spartan fortitude, under her captivating vivacity, Lady Cockburn sat with her cousin after the maid had left her for the night, still guarded and prudent, though less suave in her manner; indeed, a good deal of the acidity of her nature, which rarely failed to make itself apparent to those with whom she was intimate, was uppermost now, not at

all, it must be confessed, to the surprise of her little victim, who had been very nervous for some days as to what Margaretta would say about the state of affairs when she came to perceive them, for the notion of anything escaping the lynx eyes of her acute cousin did not once suggest itself to the mind of Diane.

The subject of the Harriette Field intimacy, and "the most unnecessary piece of forwardness in inviting an unknown relation of a person whose acquaintance she only made a couple of months ago," had been gone into and dismissed rather sooner than Diane had dared to hope; for, though she herself was unaware of it, nevertheless Lady Cockburn discovered that, since she had seen much of her, this simple, pliant cousin of hers had acquired a certain little dignity of manner that made it difficult, if not impossible, still to treat her as the child she had been at the time of Margaretta's government.

After the death of Augustus Deshon, which had occurred the autumn before the introduction of his daughter to her friends at Thamis Cottage, it had been arranged that Diane and her aunt should live with the Cockburns until

a sufficient period had elapsed to allow of the cousins' marriage; and accordingly the winter and early spring had been spent with them in Scotland. But the extraordinary beauty of Diane, added to the known circumstance of her large fortune, and the inability of Gussie to appreciate her, had made Lady Cockburn deem it inexpedient to allow her to remain with her in London, which had been the reason for taking Riverbank, Margaretta and her brother not having inherited their father's love and pride in the old family estate of Castle Deshon.

But now that she had come to Teddington, Lady Cockburn asked herself whether it would not have been better to run the risk of letting her cousin be admired and sought after, under her own watchful eye, than that such an intimacy should exist as that which had, within the last few weeks, sprung up between Lancelot Chauncey and Diane.

To discover how deep the mischief lay was necessary before arranging her tactics further, and there seemed no better way to begin than by bestowing a little praise on Mr. Chauncey's manners, talents, and appearance, that Diane,

falling into the trap, might, either by denying ridiculously the attractive qualities of the young Lifeguardsman, or, being carried away into animated rhapsodies, betray the condition of her feelings towards him. But even the most simple-minded and least suspicious people, if desirous of concealing something from the world, may sometimes baffle the most skilful diplomatist; and Diane, with her pride calling to her to crush and live down her love, and endure anything rather than its discovery, fairly puzzled Lady Cockburn by the calm manner in which she parried the thrusts of her antagonist's weapon.

"Handsome?" she said; "I should have been afraid to apply that epithet if you had not used it first. We almost always differ about good looks. I admire Mr. Chauncey's face very much, and I like him very well. You can't think how nice it has been to have him so close at hand. We play together for hours every day, and it is such good practice for me."

"Good practice!" thought Lady Cockburn. "I wonder in how many ways besides music?" She said aloud, "I don't think you are con-

ceited, Di; but I suppose you imagine him to be at your feet?"

"By no means—except in manner. He is a desperate flirt, you know."

"My dear child, fancy your having become such a woman of the world as not to be taken in by a professed lady killer like Lance Chauncey!"

"I am not so very young, Ettie; and besides, I have Mrs. Ross's word for it that Mr. Chauncey is the very greatest flirt in existence; he certainly is the most outrageous I have ever met, with the exception of your ancient Cavalier, Monsieur de Beaumanoir," said Diane, with a laugh at the memory of the extravagantly ridiculous homage, rouged cheeks, and dyed moustache of Margaretta's adorer.

"Don't be silly. You can't compare Lance Chauncey to an old wigged, painted mummy in stays!" said Lady Cockburn. "Di, I will be candid with you. Ah! is it not extraordinary? My head is perfectly well; the pain goes as it comes, suddenly, as the blow of a hammer."

"I am so glad and thankful; poor Ettie, I sincerely hope it will not return."

"Not till eight o'clock to-morrow. But I was saying that Lance Chauncey is such a dreadful sort of man to have about one. No doubt he has talked to you of me. I don't know whether he likes me exactly; very possibly not, for, without snubbing him, I have had to let him see that I did not choose to be talked about; and any woman, especially if she is married, does get talked about, if she allows the marked attentions of a man like Lance. Of course Sir Malcolm's age makes me more particular than many people are; but *you*, dear, will have to be even more careful than I, because, though I am sure he is very much attached, and all that, and admires you —in fact, he asked me to-night if I didn't think you managed the honours of the house well—yet Gussie is not quite domesticated enough, and will be too much like a French husband for it to be well for you to allow this flirtation of yours to go on. Certainly, it may only be because he has no one else down here to carry on with, that friend of yours having eyes for no one but Gussie; and we have heard of hearts being caught on the rebound. Lance Chauncey's great flame—(a married

woman; he seems to prefer the safety of a flirtation with married or engaged people)—gave him his *congé* the other day, and has gone off to Cowes in the 'Stella,' her brother's yacht; and you, being such a contrast to her——" &c., &c. We need not follow Lady Cockburn's intentionally rambling monologue, which continued for some time, till her cousin was almost tempted to wish that the neuralgic attack would return, and make her cease.

When at length she was alone, Diane wondered to herself why she should feel so much more unhappy than she had been before Lady Cockburn's communication, and could not bring herself to believe that the knowledge that some one did, or had, occupied Lancelot Chauncey's heart, was a trouble to her. That lady who was such a contrast to herself! She had not asked in what respect—whether in complexion, features, or disposition—they so differed, nor had she sought to learn her rival's name.

"Why should he not love, and why should I grudge him the happiness?" Stay! Lancelot loved, as she herself did—loved some one who was not free to love again. Ah! she

must—it was her fate to love him all the deeper for the pity she could now feel for him, enduring, as he was, a misery similar to her own.

CHAPTER XI.

"To dream of joy, and wake to sorrow,
Is doom'd to all who love or live;
And if, when conscious on the morrow,
We scarce our fancy can forgive,
That cheated us in slumber only,
To leave the waking soul more lonely.
What must they feel whom no false vision,
But truest, tenderest passion warm'd?
Sincere, but swift in sad transition,
As if a dream alone had charm'd?
Ah! sure such grief is fancy's scheming,
And all thy change can be but dreaming!"

In accordance with a prettily-expressed note of invitation from Diane, and in obedience to her niece's desire "that she would get away from her snobbish connections," Mrs. Carewe in a few days arrived at Riverbank.

They were all prepossessed in her favour; she was a pretty, gentle, shrinking little woman, who listened attentively to all that was said to

her, no matter how uninteresting might be the subject, with appreciative little expressions of "Ah!" and "Dear, dear!" never obtruding herself in conversation, though always ready to make an observation where one was needed; in fine, her coming in no wise disappointed Miss Field's expectation, who was fairly sensible of her aunt's amiability, and believed that her presence would be both pleasant and advantageous to herself.

For Harriette was too clever not to be thoroughly aware that, in the game which she had believed to be in her own hands, there was now a skilled and wary adversary to contend with. Though Lady Cockburn had fancied, from the tone of her mother's letters during the past month, that there would be some slight work for her during her visit at Riverbank, in order to free Gussie from the toils of a designing, clever woman, the unexpected anxiety on Diane's account, despite that little person's good acting, somewhat divided her attention and interest, yet not in so great a degree as to detain her from resolutely and successfully preventing anything in the shape of a *tête-à-tête* between her brother and Miss

Field, and the first sentence Harriette spoke when alone with her aunt, soon after the latter's arrival, was an urgent appeal to her to occupy Lady Cockburn's attention, if that were ever possible, or at any rate to keep her from so incessantly fastening herself upon Gussie.

"From morning till night she sticks to him like a leech," said Miss Field, with more force than elegance, in a tone of suppressed passion, as she sat moodily by the dressing table, not attempting to help her aunt, who was neatly and daintily arranging her clothes in the wardrobe. "It is not a week ago that I told you I was sure of him, and now I am baffled by that woman—he is too great a fool to resist her, and will marry Diane in a month or two as meekly as though he had never seen and made love to me!"

"Oh, then," said Mrs. Carewe, "this Lady Cockburn wishes her brother to marry Miss Deshon, I presume?"

"Well, I suppose she does, seeing that they have been engaged for the last two or three years."

"Harriette! you cruel, heartless girl, have you literally no mercy, none of the milk of

human kindness, that you can scheme and plot to deprive *your friend* of her lover? Your conduct is, to my thinking, treachery, my child."

"Before you condemn, or even abuse me, let me make you understand that it is because I do so overflow with the milk, nay, the *crême de la crême*, of human kindness, that I can't keep still and see two lives spoilt for lack of a little manœuvring; two lives—it would be three. Deshon would be very happy married to me, and Di married to Gussie would, I verily believe, be wretched. She is now on the very verge of being in love with a man I *loathe*," she said fiercely, between her teeth; "a man I almost fear; I cannot tell why, but since I discovered that I could not count him as one on the list of my admirers, I have somehow felt as if he knew all about me. No, not that; of course, that is impossible, yet I always have the sensation that he doubts and disapproves of me. He is greatly taken with Di, and would marry her, I believe, if she were free, for she is worth having, even with half her fortune. Are you satisfied now, you scrupulously honourable woman?"

"Yes; that is, if you are telling me the

truth; but I fear you are capable of speaking falsely, for the sake of gaining your purpose."

"A pleasant truth that, I vow," said Harriette, with a shrug, "but you will be able to judge for yourself, whether it would not be a real kindness to little Di to snap the knots that bind her at present, and let her marry the lanky prig who is after her."

By the time Colonel Ross was able to come home for a day, to see "his wife and bairnies three," although she considered the presence of Lady Cockburn a most beneficial circumstance for the Riverbank household, Minnie had quite tired of the thin, eager face, the strained, artificial manner, and "the peacock voice," as Lancelot designated the affected, high-pitched drawl of Gussie and his sister. Margaretta's patronizing manner of openly criticizing, or commenting upon Diane's proceedings, or any newly seen article of dress, offended her very early in the day, but her exclamation on seeing the little Rosses, "Oh! how *can* you have so many children?" put a finishing stroke, and the young mother vehemently declared "that she hoped Miss Field would marry young Deshon, only for the sake of aggravating Lady Cockburn."

That was how she spoke to Lancelot; but to her husband she gave another, and a better reason, for her earnest desire that the engagement between the cousins should be broken off.

"It is true," she said, "that Diane and that puppy—that 'oiled and curled Assyrian bull'—have known each other too long to be exactly like ordinary lovers, and it is silly to expect a man to pay attention to nobody but the girl he is engaged to. Did I make a fuss when you lost those gloves to Nelly O'Dowde, and sent Clara Green your photograph? But the way in which Gussie Deshon and that Field girl went on together before Lady Cockburn came was too disgraceful. And then it was natural enough that Lance should devote himself to Diane; and of course she likes him to be hanging about her, and he is, from morning till night."

"Small blame to him," said the imperturbable Frederick.

"But, Fritz, darling, I am so dreadfully afraid when I think what Diane's married life will be. She is to be married before next season, and is always talking of the house she means to have in town, and her parties, and

opera box, and that. Then think what it will be! Lance doesn't flirt with her in an ordinary silly, absurd way, but their music and German reading make it all the more dangerous, because, with such tastes in common, he won't get tired of her, I expect. And now *indeed*, dear, this can't go on. There would be the most dreadful scandal about them in London. Could he go on with her there as he does down here, without getting her talked about? No, of course he couldn't!"

"My sweet, does he get talked about for you? It seems to me that when we are at home Lance is pretty often in Eccleston Square."

"Oh, Fred! you owl! You know how very different his visits are to us to what they would be to Diane. She is too good and superior, and all that, for him to behave objectionably; but still he must flirt with her, in a measure, and the world won't believe what a little pure-minded, innocent girl she is. Besides," Minnie said, with her pretty face on her husband's shoulder, "*I* have a safeguard against being talked about; I am 'in love,' you know, and will be always.

Diane can never, *never* love her husband one quarter of an eighth of a fraction of an inch as much as I love you, and the world knows I love you. Happy wives are not accused of flirting."

"Then what a glut of unhappy ones there must be!" said Colonel Ross. "But don't distress yourself, dear girl. Diane will be off with the old love entirely in a little while, and regularly on with Lance, and you'll have her for a cousin-in-law, and your favourite baa baa blacksheep will reform and steady down into the soberest and best of Benedicks."

"Then you *do* think he is *really* in love with her? He is so heartless, and such a flirt. Do you believe he loves Diane as you loved me?"

"*Loved?* Minnie, darling! Have I left off, then? No; he could not love her so much as that, because she is not you," said her husband, stooping to kiss the straight white line in the middle of her wavy hair.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Romeo and Juliet," said Lancelot, entering the room, looking rather cross and hot. He had been on the river with Lady Cockburn and the

others, and had found previous afternoons on the water more pleasant than this one in question.

He could not have said why he had not enjoyed the excursion, except perhaps that, though she was always most gracious, and even affectionate, to him, Lady Cockburn had the art of rubbing him the wrong way, and that he had been in a bad temper ever since her arrival at Teddington. Yet it was impossible for him to feel that Diane had altered towards him in manner; indeed, if anything, she was more sweet and friendly, for the great force she put upon herself not to seem to change, because she had sometimes, for an instant at a time, half believed he cared a little bit about her, and the belief in the fact of his unfortunate attachment to Mrs. Vane Emerton, of which circumstance Lady Cockburn constantly reminded her, allowed her to be cordial and easy, and even gay in her demeanour, and never apparently to shun that society which she felt to be so cruelly dangerous to her peace of mind, and, in a measure, to her conscience.

Matters were taking their course, in Lady

Cockburn's opinion, as well as could be expected. Her tactics, with regard to the business of her brother and Miss Field, had been to ignore the palpable fact of his extreme admiration for the blue-eyed syren, and, save by a little supercilious disparagement of her charms, a kind of patronizing, and, at the same time, damning with faint praise, to conceal her own dislike to her. But Gussie knew his sister well, and was aware that she perceived the wavering, uncertain condition of his mind, and his inability to accomplish the bold stroke of altering all the settled plans of his life. His shallow indolence prevented him from making the necessary move towards what he had just energy sufficient to fancy would make him "awfully happy;" he had acquired the habit from boyhood of firmly believing in, and admiring, "Ettie's brains," and he now bowed to her authority, partly from force of habit, partly because he could not feel exactly sure that he wanted to give up Diane, or rather Diane's money, and yielded to the suggestion that he should go abroad for a few weeks' farewell fun at the different gaming places, before his

bachelor days were over, and "The Emperor's" eccentric idea of closing the tables was carried out.

It was with some surprise, and much disappointment, mixed with contempt, that Harriette saw Gussie leave her, without a proposal to transfer his troth from his cousin to herself. Daring and reckless by nature as she was, it was difficult for her to comprehend the dilatory puniness of his disposition, and she let herself hope on, believing that he would come back, and that when Lady Cockburn's gas-lamp eyes were removed, he would find courage and resolution to tell Diane plainly that he loved her friend. Meanwhile, Margaretta watched, with satisfaction, the dull, listless expression that grew daily more fixed in the marble face, and smiled to herself when Harriette sang—

"He will return, I know him well,"

believing that she knew her brother equally well, if not better, than Miss Field, and that Gussie, volatile as any weathercock, was enjoying the gaieties of Spa too thoroughly well to return to a quiet humdrum suburban house and merely one out of a thousand flirtations,

before Harriette should have found the life at Riverbank too monotonous, and so have taken her departure. She could not foresee that something was about to happen, which would effectually put a stop to her anxiety on Gussie's account.

Other people besides Diane Deshon had read, and felt an interest in, the daily advertisements for the missing heir of the Kildorin estates; and though the young man's secret had been fairly well kept, neither his fellows, nor any of the officers in the —th Royal Regiment, lately returned from New Zealand, felt or expressed incredulity, when Corporal Leary asked leave of absence in order to go and report himself to the family solicitors, and claim the title of Viscount Kildorin.

In the ten years that had elapsed since the disappearance of Kilian O'Lary, he had merely developed from a slight, handsome, harebrained boy, into a broad-shouldered, soldierly-looking man, very little altered either in manner or face, and no one thought of raising a doubt as to his identity.

The news of his return, or discovery, reached Thamis Cottage one evening, just as the Rosses

and Lancelot were going in to dine at Riverbank. It was a fortnight since the arrival of Lady Cockburn, who was growing feverishly anxious as to the result of her scheme for breaking asunder the chain that was winding together so firmly the hearts of Diane and Lancelot, and who also was thinking of the invitations she had bestowed upon numerous important and desirable friends to visit her in Scotland, during the month of August.

"I feel particularly curious to see this Kilian, for I believe he was, once upon a time, an admirer of my wife's," said Colonel Ross, as they sat round the table after dinner.

"What a pity you are married, Mrs. Ross," drawled Lady Cockburn. "If you had only waited you might have been a—— What's the title?"

"Only Viscount," said Lancelot, "and not worth having, either—it is a miserable property."

"Dear, dear, what a pity," said Mrs. Carewe, in her gentle voice; and Harriette's slow, hard tones were heard through the gloom—it was late, and the lamps had not been lighted. "I thought you said just now that the property

had been accumulating for ten years. It ought to have improved."

"Did I say so?" said Lancelot. "Yes, it is true, but——"

Mrs. Carewe, an almost unknown thing with her, here interrupted—"What Mr. Chauncey said, dearest Harrie, was that the heir had been missing for ten years."

"But the first is the case, too," said Minnie; "although there has been a Lord Kildorin for the last ten years, not one farthing of the property has he been able to touch. It's quite like a novel; you know there were only two of them—Dermot and Kilian——"

"Two of—— I don't exactly understand, my dear," said Mrs. Deshon.

"She means that Dermot and Kilian were the only two children of Lord Kildorin," said Fred, in the tone of one reading the preliminary chapter of a child's story book.

"And Dermot was always a little brute, and Kilian a darling," continued Minnie; "and when Dermot was expelled from Sandhurst poor Kilian took the disgrace so much to heart, that he ran away, and Lord Kildorin took that so much to heart, that he died."

"My dear Minnie, don't be so utterly romantic. He lived quite two years after Kilian went off, and then broke his back, not his heart," said Lancelot.

"Yes, I know; but I was going to tell them about his being so furious with Dermot, and of course he was quite right—nasty drunken thing, and we let him be baby's godfather! He tied up every scrap of money that he possibly could (and there was nothing hardly to tie up), and settled it on Kilian, and Dermot, even when he came into the title, had not a shilling but what his mother spared him from her jointure."

"What became of Lord Kildorin—the one you call Dermot?" inquired Harriette hoarsely.

"Oh, poor fellow! he quite went to the bad, as might be expected. He lived about at different gaming places, I believe; at all events, he was never seen in England till two years ago, when Lady Kildorin had an illness, and, thinking she was dying, sent for him, and there was a sort of reconciliation. Neither his father nor mother ever cared so much for their eldest boy as they did about Kilian—and no wonder. Lancey, shall you ever forget

what a dear merry bird he was in the old days? Oh! I do so long to see him again."

"Oh, take care, Minnie!" said Diane. "Colonel Ross is here."

"My dear, he won't be jealous, no such luck. That's the worst of being married. So long as a man is only your lover he is jealous of everybody else in the universe, and it's beautiful to keep him in a state of fume; but just as soon as he's your husband he leaves off being in any trouble about you, and half the fun of life is over. Why, I might adore fifteen dozen men all at once, and Fred would never be at the bother of caring a straw."

Mrs. Carewe chirped something to the effect of "mutual confidence being the one source of happiness in the wedded state," and then the conversation continued about Lord Kildorin.

He was with his mother, so they had learned from Minnie's relations, the O'Grady's, to whom, as the oldest and dearest friends of the family, the news of the wanderer's return had been communicated almost as soon as it reached the ears of Lady Kildorin, but whether they were in County Fermanagh or elsewhere, Miss

Kathleen, with the vagueness characteristic of her charming, but somewhat rattle-pated compatriots, had not informed her sister in her letter, so that Lancelot, though most anxious to hasten to and greet his old companion, would be forced to wait until either Lord Kildorin sought him out or more decided news could be obtained.

"In mercy keep 'The Scrag' away from me. She likes you, and you can do it," whispered Lancelot to Colonel Ross, when an emphatic assurance from Lady Cockburn "that she could listen to Mr. Chauncey's playing for a century," met his ears on entering the drawing-room. He wondered at himself for the great dislike he bore towards this woman, who, independent and even insolent as her manners were in so very many instances, was to him always gentle, courteous, almost deferential, and who, with no thought of mere coquetry—from that he perfectly exonerated her—appeared to take so great an interest in him. That she had discovered his secret was no fair reason for hating her, for she had never seemed annoyed at the knowledge she possessed, nay, had she not that very day, apparently without thinking at the

time, used expressions of familiarity for which she had excused herself by pleading the difficulty of distinguishing with those held in great regard—the difference between *relations* and simply *friends?* No confidence had ever been more warmly invited than that which Lady Cockburn perseveringly sought; and while he despised himself for thinking of yielding to her, fifty times had Lancelot been tempted to demand explanation of the insinuations she so continually threw out, and ask her if there existed the faintest hope that Diane would accept him if he were formally to ask her to try and love him.

"If Di gets much thinner and paler, she will be hardly pretty at all, except her features and the shape of her head," Mrs. Ross had said only a few hours ago, in her cousin's presence, in allusion to a remark of Fred's that Diane was looking very delicate.

He had made no reply to this comment, and of course did not agree with Minnie as to the possibility of Diane's ever becoming one shade less beautiful; but as he stood behind her that night, whilst she played his accompaniment, he was struck by the increased frailness of her

always slight hands, and noted that her rings all slipped round as though the fingers were grown too slender to retain them safely in position.

And there was a worn, pathetic expression about her lips when she was silent, and her eyes had a look of sleeplessness and unrest, save when in meeting his own they seemed for an instant to smile and brighten, that first troubled him, only to thrill him afterwards with the tumultuous belief that the time was coming when it would not be vain for him to claim, in return for the loving worship he had poured upon her, the task of teaching her sweet, pure heart to respond to his own great passion.

CHAPTER XII.

"Bonheur de se revoir
Après l'absence."

BEFORE going back again to Aldershott, Colonel Ross had, good-naturedly, and as though it were a great favour to himself, pressed Lancelot to remain and look after Minnie and the children as long as he possibly could, with, perhaps, a little chaff added as to the attraction which had already kept him so long constant to the banks of the Thames; and, as the days went on, and he had not departed, Diane's growing love and admiration, secret as it was, became something like hero worship, as she praised him in her heart for his manly courage, and resolution not to give way to his unhappy attachment, which, from its very birth, must have been wrong. She knew that,

having discovered from Margaretta the fact that he was not acquainted with Mrs. Vane Emerton until she had been for many months a wife.

She had schooled and scolded herself into the belief that, whilst it could be kept secret from Lancelot that she had allowed herself to love him, she need not shun his society. He did not flirt with her now as much as he used; and though an overwhelming change had come upon her, it was not one that she could regret, and she would soon be able to look back on the period of her short dream with a cheerful smile at her own idle folly, and might love and esteem as a friend the man whom it now seemed the wisdom, as well as the duty, of her life to banish from her heart.

One afternoon, Minnie lying down in her room, rather languid and overcome with the heat of the weather, Lancelot's steps led him into the next house, though he had seen the barouche drive off, lady-laden, not half-an-hour before. But he had seen that Mrs. Deshon was in the carriage, and the faces under the three remaining parasols were invisible; and there being at that time five ladies resident at

Riverbank, he took it into his head that Riverbank's mistress might be at home alone in that purple sanctuary, and not unwilling to receive him.

However, he was destined to be disappointed, as Lady Cockburn was the one left at home; and not deeming it either polite or politic to withdraw, he went in, and endeavoured to appear easy and pleasant for about a quarter of an hour, after which space, thinking him very dull and absent, and not considering it yet safe to bring the scheme she was weaving to a crisis, Margaretta suddenly caused herself to remember that she must write a letter to India by that day's post, or she would miss the next mail, and cordially hoping he would wait till the others returned, she withdrew.

Lancelot did not know that her ladyship had not a single Indian correspondent, nor that it wanted several days to the despatching of the Indian mails, but he did know that he was glad she had left him; and—for the place did not seem right without Diane's placid presence—he walked down the garden, and, throwing himself into a chair at the river's brink, began, with the help of a cigar, to *think* as

deliberately as any woman. But his cigar was flung away as far on the river's surface as it would go before it was fairly between his lips, and Mr. Chauncey rose from his comfortable lounge, muttering to himself, "Cad! to come taking possession of her house as if I had a right to be free of the place! Fool! to let every one know that I cannot keep away from her! They shall not have the laugh at me by finding me waiting here."

A person with tolerably long legs and some agility could manage to get from one garden into the other, as, where the lawns sloped down to the river, they were simply separated by a low piece of wire-trellis. Lancelot, being possessed of an unusually lengthy pair of legs and also great activity of motion, frequently made the necessary stride, which was attended by no greater danger than the soiling of his boots, the bank being damp and slippery.

Not considering it any profanation to smoke in his cousin's garden, he was lighting a second cigar, when the sound of a voice behind, crying, "Lance, for a thousand pounds!" arrested him, and he threw it down, and hastened to meet the man who was advancing towards him.

"Kilian!" "Dear, dear old fellow!" were cried simultaneously, as the two friends grasped hands, and gazed into each other's faces, so well remembered, unseen for so many years.

There is no reason why men—Englishmen, I mean—should not embrace each other when they are overjoyed at meeting again after a long separation. Two women would have stayed cheek to cheek, hand in hand, giving relief to the emotion of their feelings for a while before beginning to impart their heart's news. The servant who had admitted the visitor to the drawing-room, and pointed out Lancelot to him, sitting under the willows, afterwards declared "that Mr. Chauncey and his lordship seemed that glad to meet, they nearly kissed each other." Certainly Lord Kildorin's arm was round Lancelot's neck, when the two sat down, to hear all that had happened on either side during the past ten years.

"I must go to Ireland in a few days," said the "Corporal Leary," when he had given a brief account of himself. "I begin to long for the dear old home, though all will seem changed. Poor old dad! poor Dermot! both

gone, and Minnie and O'Grady married! Pretty Min, tell me about her—when will she come? Is her husband good?"

"The best fellow in the world," replied Lancelot warmly, "and Minnie is the same merry, loving little thing she ever was."

"And Mr. and Mrs. O'Grady, and that little fat kitten of a Katty?"

"My uncle and aunt are unaltered, I think; but Katty would be highly indignant with you if she heard herself called a 'fat kitten.' She is a grand young lady now, quite grown up, in her own estimation, and as pretty as Minnie."

"I hope, then, she is to be Mrs. Lancey?"

"I don't suppose there ever will be such a lady."

"Faith! and why not, now?"

"Oh, I don't know, but at any rate little Kate would not look at me; she is ambitious, she says, and must marry a title, so look to yourself, my lad; she may take a fancy to you."

"I'll ask her to marry me directly I go over to Kildorin, bless her heart! but I am too poor for any one to think of—— Ah! Minnie——"

Lord Kildorin's handsome brown face flushed all over, as Mrs. Ross, having heard the news of his arrival, here came running down the garden.

"Of those three old playmates, Minnie was the one most altered during the time that had passed since they were girl and boys. Ten years ago Mrs. Ross had been still a child, small and young-looking for her age, with floating hair, very short frocks, and a pinafore, whereas the two tall striplings of nineteen had merely developed into handsome, well-formed young men.

It is needless to enter into all that was said during that first visit of Lord Kildorin's; his introduction to Minnie's children, who most dutifully did as they were desired, and took to him immediately, and his playful anger at their mother for having, as he said, jilted himself and Lancelot, and taken up suddenly with a man he had never even heard of.

"When my mother told me that my little sweetheart was a married woman with a family my heart was like to break, Minnie, my dear," he declared pathetically, "but indeed I'm glad you're not married to old Lancey."

Minnie made him promise to come on an early day and be introduced to the hero, the man of men, to whom she was married, and consoled him for the fact of her being unable herself to become his wife with the promise that she would make it her business to provide him with a Lady Kildorin.

The Dowager Lady Kildorin dined in London that day without her newly-found son, for Kilian remained at Teddington until the latest train up to town.

In the evening, as they were sitting by the river, Lancelot wondering whether Diane would take any notice of his not having waited to see her that afternoon, when she should glide down her garden with the other ladies presently, Lord Kildorin broke off in the middle of some early reminiscence to cry—

"Ah! there's a pretty little moon, and the stars are coming out fast—what a sweet night!"

Doubly sweet at that moment, Lancelot thought, for a slight white figure was advancing, and Diane cried to Lady Cockburn and Harriette, who were beside her,

"Actually, Colonel Ross is there!"

"No, he isn't," said Minnie, rising to talk to

her friend over the hedge; "but how funny that you should have come out just at this moment when your namesake makes her appearance in the sky. Kilian, come here; I want to introduce my oldest and newest friends to one another—Lord Kildorin, Miss Deshon, Lady Cockburn, Miss Field."

"You should be Irish, from your name, Miss Deshon," said Lord Kildorin, growing perfectly at home with Diane in a few moments, as Lady Cockburn beckoned Lancelot to come over and speak to her, and Harriette slowly retraced her steps to the house. "Are you of County Donegal?"

"Yes," answered Diane, "though I am sorry to be obliged to confess that I have never been there. Do you happen to have known any of us?"

"I know *one* now, and one worth knowing too, but that's all; till I saw you, Miss Deshon, your family was but a name to me," he replied with his country's gallantry; "but what on earth does Minnie mean?—You are not Miss *Moon* Deshon?"

"Yes, she is," broke in Minnie, thinking it disloyal to Lancelot to permit Lord Kildorin's

incipient flirtation to proceed unchecked, "but for all that, she won't stand having moonshine talked to her—will you, Diane? May I bring this man in to you? you see Lance has gone already."

There was a migration from Thamis Cottage to Riverbank, where Harriette, out of compliment to the new comer, sang Irish melodies until it was time for Lord Kildorin to depart, by which time the young nobleman was in a sufficient state of enthusiasm to declare to Minnie in confidence, that if she did not very speedily present him to the wife she had promised to provide for him, he should have chosen for himself, if every lady was as beautiful and enchanting as the galaxy assembled that evening at Riverbank.

Diane had looked such a sweet, pure star, and had felt so almost happy and serene as she sat by Minnie's side, with Lady Cockburn close at hand in brilliant spirits, amusing them all with her chatter to Lancelot about their common friends in London, criticisms on different people, parties, flirtations, little scandals, and so forth; and Diane's knight, her hero, had in so many thousand inexplicable little ways

made her feel as though her presence in town would be to him the first interest in the coming season, that, although he had been guilty of the folly of a luckless infatuation for a woman either too heartless or too good to return his passion, still he did like *her*, and found a pleasure in her society that almost justified her (he being what he was) in abandoning to him all that fond clinging love of which she had only so lately discovered herself to be capable of enduring.

"Ah, because I love him, he will love me soon," she half murmured to herself that night when she was alone, beginning to undress, and the smile the thought awoke was still playing round her lips, and remarked by Lady Cockburn, who rustled into the room, crying,

"You vain child, smirking at yourself in the glass in that way! Positively I think you are becoming conceited. But why *do* you wear such a thick ruff round your neck? They are quite *outré*. I suppose Lance Chauncey tells you you are like Mary Stuart. My dear Di, believe me, it is the greatest mistake in the world to let a man think you hang on his opinion like that."

"I don't think Mr. Chauncey ever notices what I have on," Diane said with a queer little laugh. "Why do you think I hang upon his opinion? We often differ, I assure you; he likes Bach better than Spohr." She felt that some faultfinding was in store for her regarding Lancelot, and could not tell why, for she thought her conduct and his had been so very circumspect of late, and that almost the whole of his attention had been monopolized by Margaretta. Indeed, Lady Cockburn was there with the intention of inflicting torture, far deeper and harder to bear than any amount of censure or expostulation. She was tired of Riverbank, though the ease and quiet had been most beneficial to her health—she wanted to get to Scotland without further delay, and what had to be done must be done at once.

Yet it was rather difficult to accomplish, and occasionally some little feelings of compunction, which she tried utterly to stifle by telling herself that she meant it for the best, that it was for her brother's sake, that Diane had not really heart enough to suffer much, and, for Lancelot Chauncey, he was nothing to her.

Thoughts of her own girlish days, and the brief period of her love, came back to her during her moments of regret, but had no weight with her. Had she not to feel always the degrading truth, that her artist lover, despising the pride and worldliness that had cast him from her, had ceased to care for her long, long before her self-inflicted wound was healed? And did she not owe her unconscious little cousin a grudge, for having innocently excited Mr. Seymour's admiration, slightly to the disparagement of Lady Cockburn's too early-waning beauty, when he had seen at Sir Malcolm's house, that spring, the pale-faced girl, so little aged or altered, though improved and matured into a beautiful woman, whom he had been commissioned to represent on his canvas, when his first patron, Augustus Deshon, had afforded him the, at that time, priceless boon of painting the portrait of his love, some half-dozen years ago? This jealousy, the almost dislike she had lately borne towards Diane, was a puny and undignified sensation, for which Margaretta half despised herself; but it made it seem easier for her to gain her end. Taking up the necklace her cousin had

just unfastened and laid upon the table, she said,

"You should not wear these pearls on a high dress: it makes them look sham. Will you keep Emma away for a little while? I have something to say to you. Dear me! don't you, when you are in mourning, put your dressing-gown into mourning too? I had a *sweet* French grey for the winter. I wonder that is not too hot for you. Why don't you have white cambric ones, with black, or lilac bows?"

"Come back when I ring, please, Emma," said Diane to the maid, who here came into the room.

"Don't you mean to supply Justine's place? You save so in bonnets if you have a thorough good maid. Emma is very clever, and—*do* I like the way she has taken to dress your hair? Ye-es—it is very nice; but a French woman is such an acquisition. However, that is not what I came in to talk about. My dear child, I wonder whether you will take it as the joke it really is—I am afraid you will be annoyed, but I have had a confidence made to me, and though it appears that the extent of your

fortune is not so great as he had heard—everything gets so exaggerated—Lance Chauncey, having the assurance to think that you have fallen a victim to his superlative attractions, like fifty million other girls, considers that your money would be a valuable addition to his own pittance, and that he might as well make you happy by marrying you. Oh, my face! Is that eau-de-cologne? The agony!"

Lady Cockburn had been perfectly free from neuralgia for two or three days, and was at this moment utterly without pain. The sudden attack, so well dissembled, was merely a little ruse that her words might take effect before she proceeded further, or Diane should reply.

"Let me send for some ice," said the other, with thick, trembling utterance. "Emma can get some, if the men have gone to bed; or your quinine."

"A tumbler of water will do. There, it is not nearly so bad now; I am nothing like I was before I came down here. Sir Malcolm was positively afraid to leave me alone with the laudanum bottle. Really, Di, you might wear becoming colours, even in dressing-gowns.

That bright pink makes you as pale as a sheet!"

Well knowing that the ashy hue on the poor girl's face was not merely from the contrast of her gay peignoir, Lady Cockburn continued,

"I tried to induce him not to propose to you, but of course he only thought I was looking after Gussie's interests. I naturally wished to spare you, dear."

"And when was this fine intelligence communicated?" Diane found voice enough to ask.

"Well, he has been coming to it gradually. You know I had a visit from him this afternoon, whilst you were out?"

"Yes, you mentioned it at dinner."

"You are not vexed with me, Di, are you, for not having told you this sooner? It cannot matter to you, for I really don't think you a fool now; and besides, you must remember that I only had suspicions till to-day, and I thought I could ward him off; but this evening, whilst you were talking to Lord Kildorin—by the way, how taken with him your friend Miss Field was—I found he was perfectly determined to make you an offer, and nothing I

could say induced him to doubt the result of it."

"Did not you represent to Mr. Chauncey that his asking me to be his wife would be an insult, knowing, as he does, that I am engaged to Gussie?"

"You see your engagement is not a very palpable fact, and I suppose he forgot it; but I think, dear, you might manage that he should not come to the point; he is a nicish man, but I don't suppose he has ever been refused out-and-out in his life, and men do sometimes say really very nasty things of girls who refuse them, merely out of spite. Next year, when you are married and have a house in town, you will be fresh to society, and I don't want you to make your *début* with any cloud on your name."

"Ettie, do you believe any *gentleman* was ever so mean as to speak against a woman because she was not able to return his love?"

Lady Cockburn shrugged her shoulders, and smiled.

"There is no such thing as chivalry or honour nowadays—the qualities are extinct; men are men, and one is no better than another,"

she said. "I don't say positively that Lance Chauncey would abuse you. I merely say it is running the risk of it if you let him dangle after you with the notion he has that you care for him."

"I wish he would go away," said Diane, with an amount of anger in her voice that satisfied the ears of her hearer. "He said before you came here that he was going to the Isle of Wight, where that lady is—Mrs. Vere Emerton, you know—whom he is in love with. Why doesn't he go ?."

"He shall go, dear. Perhaps, on the whole, it will be best to let him propose, or nearly so, and you can let him see his mistake. To-morrow I will arrange that Mrs. Carewe and her niece drive in the morning, and Chauncey will be sure to come in to look after us, and I will keep out of the way, and you can get it over. Poor little woman! this bores you, I can see, and I dare say you will miss him; the undivided attention of so thorough a man of the world, such an experienced flirt, is very fascinating. *I* well know how Lance Chauncey can flirt; he has always been a great flame of mine—in quite a harmless way. You see I

don't consider it would be in good taste, with Sir Malcolm so much older than myself, and being seldom able to go about with me, for me to flirt as I used before I married; but Lance Chauncey and I are quite friends, I allow, and indeed encourage him to talk to me about his own affairs; it is so good for a man to feel he can confide in a woman of his own age—it always has a good influence over him."

Diane was spared the pain of listening to any more, by the entrance of Emma, who was tired of waiting for her mistress's bell. Lady Cockburn then affectionately kissed her cousin on each cold, pale cheek, and went away to sleep peacefully, confident in the perfection of her plans, every spark of pity, sympathy, or remorse crushed out of her and extinguished by the arrogant pride she felt at the matchless art of diplomacy to which she had attained.

CHAPTER XIII.

"With her beauty like the snow,
Let her go! Shall I repine
That no idle breath of mine
Melt it? No! 'Tis better so.
All the same, as she came
Cold, unspotted let her go!"

LANCELOT CHAUNCEY was by habit a very early riser. Even in London, and in the height of the season, when the previous day might have seen him in the morning on parade, afterwards at kettledrums, concerts, soirées, or balls, till the following dawn, it was said of him that, however early his friends might choose to call upon him at his lodgings at Knightsbridge, he was to be found shaved and dressed, ready for the business of the day, even if he were not already out of doors.

At Teddington, Diane generally awoke to

the sound of his voice, as he played with his little cousins in the garden before the Rosses' early breakfast, which was not the continental meal to which the Deshon household were accustomed, and is it strange that my little Undine should lately have found it highly necessary to her comfort that she should peep through the blind, at the tall, youthful form below, not seldomer than two or three times during the process of her toilette?

Custom is so strong and powerful, that though all was now so altered, her heavy eyes, from which sleep had been totally banished, were directed the next morning towards the spot where she was used to seeing him, by a large syringa bush which formed part of the division between the two gardens.

Since that morning when she had taken him into her garden, to gather flowers for her, and had mentioned the liking she had for that strongly-scented, sweetly-blossoming shrub, Lancelot had daily plucked a small piece of it, and worn it until its short-lived freshness was over, when the withered flower was generally replaced by some delicate exotic from the Riverbank conservatory. But the

beauty of the syringas was all but past, and for some few days the finding a piece to wear had been a difficult task, and this morning Diane thought he would fail to discover a single white petal remaining; and with a scornful little smile at her own folly in having liked and enjoyed to see her tastes and fancies imitated and adopted, as if there were a sympathy and unison of ideas between this man and herself, she was about to turn from the window, when something occurred to rivet her to the spot, causing her to strain every energy in the endeavour to catch the words that passed between Lancelot Chauncey and Lady Cockburn.

It was a pretty little scene enough for a disinterested observer to have witnessed. A handsome, graceful woman, with the morning sunlight shining on her radiant hair, walking with an active, springy step, across the soft, velvet lawn, to join the man who might have been waiting there to meet her, and whose face gladdened and lighted up with a look of genuine pleasure when she addressed him. But why should Lady Cockburn, who had never been an advocate for early rising,

or open air before breakfast time, have taken the trouble to rise and go out at this hour, unless, indeed, she was pityingly anxious to make a final attempt to save her cousin from the pain of listening to empty protestations of love from the man who had made so sure of his chances of winning the large fortune which had attracted him?

Still, it did not seem as though the lady was there for any purposes of argument or expostulation; and Diane, remembering the girlhood of beautiful Ettie Deshon, who had turned so many heads, and broken, remorselessly, as goodly a number of hearts, believed, as she watched them, unable to hear even the sound of their voices, that her cousin's statement of the admiration and regard felt for her by Lancelot was not the mere vaunt of over self-esteem and vanity that she had fancied it. She watched her pick for him a flower, she saw that blossom put for an instant to his lips, ere she tore herself away, sick and miserable, to nerve herself for the struggle of preserving calmly the deceptive dignity which was to mislead Lancelot, and hide from Margaretta and the world the knowledge of the

searing blight that had fallen upon her heretofore unruffled existence.

Never once, in all the blue, unclouded weather of her life, had the faintest feeling of jealousy found admission in her breast, and the pang she now felt was the more acute from the utter novelty of the sensation. With a chill, throbbing heart, and that choking ache in the throat which most of us have had or may have still to bear, which some can endure with smiling lips and gaiety of manner, she went downstairs.

A stranger entering the room would not easily have been persuaded that the thoughts of certainly three of the women there assembled were far away from the pretty little breakfast-table and the light gossip they talked. Lady Cockburn, unusually gracious in her patronizing way to Harriette now that Gussie was—at any rate for the present—safe from her fascinations, chafed and fretted inwardly till the interview between Diane and Lancelot should be over; Harriette, secretly moody at the upset of her hopes, was able to conceal her chagrin. Mrs. Carew was the one most free from care and anxiety: she was

rather sorry, for her niece's sake, at Gussie's departure, but there was no sense of mortification in her disappointment to trouble her. Diane, sweetly performing her duty as hostess, strong in her newly-born pride and sense of injury, appeared serene as ever, though she had had no opportunity of asking Margaretta whether there was any respite for her, or if (when amiable little Mrs. Carewe, smiling her grateful acknowledgments of "dear Lady Cockburn's kind thoughtfulness in proposing that she should drive to Kingston for a yard of elastic, the want of which she had deplored last evening, whilst the day was cool and pleasant," had gone off with Harriette) she was to expect that cruel visit, for which she assured herself she was sufficiently braced and ready.

Every thorough woman is an actress born, and there was no tremor apparent in Diane's manner when, as the door-bell rang, Lady Cockburn said significantly, "I will go upstairs and see mamma. Call me when he is gone," and left her alone in the drawing-room, where it seemed impossible to breathe, with the hot sun pouring through the purple blinds,

and the almost overpowering perfume of the flowers.

Her face and voice in greeting Lancelot, as he entered, were calm and cool as an autumn noon; whilst he, pale and agitated, even still doubtful whether to implore her for that love which she was going to perjure herself by disavowing, found his voice trembling and unsteady when he attempted to reply to her quiet "Good morning, Mr. Chauncey."

Happiness will fluster one, or the hope that the issue of our actions will prove satisfactory and successful; but in the knowledge that there is no hope, no chance of joy, there is nothing to agitate—the feeling that all is over, or that one must crush out everything from one's life, brings with its dull, aching misery calm, even though it be the dead calmness of despair. Lancelot, with more of doubt than hope as to the termination of this interview, despite all Lady Cockburn's encouragement, after a moment began to speak.

"I am, as usual, an early visitor, Miss Deshon," he said. "My excuse to-day must be that I am come 'pour dire adieu.'"

Oh! had he repented? Was he not so mean

and wicked as she had been forced to believe? She was hardly yet mistress enough of her part to speak without the proper cue from him, and what he had said had not been expected. She answered hurriedly,

"Good-bye! Why do you leave us so suddenly? Surely you had no intention of doing so yesterday?"

"I have had a letter this morning from Lord Lonville, and I have intended all the summer to take a short cruise in his yacht 'Stella.'"

In a moment her transitory jealousy of Margaretta was dispelled, and the vision of Lancelot sailing along with the woman he really loved rose in her mind. She was sitting in a large armchair, with one little foot resting on an ottoman; he had not sat down, but leaned upon the end of the piano, not many yards from her, his face half shaded by his hand. She glanced at him for a moment, all the happy days of her brief acquaintance with him crowding together in her memory, and could say nothing. He wore no piece of syringa now; there was about him a look of dejection, not like the demeanour of a hopeful suitor come there confident of success, and, till he broke the silence,

Diane thought and trusted that he was not going to speak to her of love.

"Luna," he said at length, "you who know Goethe, and Heine, Tennyson, and Mrs. Browning by heart, have you ever heard the old lines—

> "'He either fears his fate too much,
> Or his deserts are small,
> Who fears to put it to the touch,
> To win or forfeit all?'

Heaven knows, as I do, *my* deserts are small enough—they are nowhere, and I very much fear my fate, yet I am going to ask you whether my fate is to forfeit all, or if you will let me stay here?"

He was not looking at her: whilst speaking, he had paced the room, and as he finished, stood behind her chair. After a pause of a few moments, Diane said quietly,

"Am I to decide whether you have a cruise in your friend's yacht 'Stella' or not?"

"You must tell me, Miss Deshon, if I am to stay here, near you, to continue living in the peace and joy of your presence, or if I must go away—whether to Lord Lonville or the devil, I suppose, would not matter."

"Harrie would say—really she and Gussie

are very profane sometimes; I think very witty people generally are—that you would be very senseless to go to—where you said last, in such sultry weather."

"I beseech you, do not joke with me, Luna," said Lancelot, sitting on the stool at her feet; and, mastering his emotion, he went on, "Miss Deshon, I am bold and presumptuous, but your sweetness and my man's conceit, as you may term it, have let me hope, till I believe almost that you do not dislike my society. For all the past month—all the time that I have been blessed by knowing you—you have made me your knight, your servant: your slightest word or wish has been law to me. What wages am I to have for my devotion? The days of slavery are over: men do not remain in bondage for ever without reward. I am bargaining with my mistress now. I have given her my whole heart and soul; what will she give me in return? Oh, Diane, will you not tell me you can love me?"

The moment had arrived; the great struggle of her life would be over presently. As the wretched creatures about to end their days will close their eyes as they leap into the cold

death-stream below them, so Diane now, to avoid the eager, passionate face upturned to hers, drooped her long lashes, as, leaning back in her chair, her lips forced into a little smile, she said,

"Mr. Chauncey, it is not so very many days since you made a sort of sketch of my character. What has altered your opinion of me so entirely in this short space of time, as to lead you to think that a woman, totally without heart, should have fallen in love with you? But all that you have been saying may be a jest," she continued, opening her eyes and meeting his gaze, the coined smile leaving her mouth as she proudly said, "but it is a jest in bad taste, I think, when it is considered that I am the affianced wife of another man."

"Forgive me, Miss Deshon; you cannot wonder if that circumstance sometimes escapes my memory. You do not ask me to believe that you love him?"

"I merely wish you to understand that all you said about me, that day at Hampton Court, was the truth, though it sounded rather startling as you spoke the words."

It was not difficult now; now that the first

lie that had ever found utterance from her lips was spoken, it was comparatively easy to continue. She waited for Lancelot to say, "I have made a fatal error, and you can never love me. If things were different; if I had rank and wealth to offer you——" and then interrupted him with,

"If you were King Cophetua, or the Lord of Burleigh, and I a beggar maiden, you would say. But you see I am not; I am, as Harriette expresses it, 'hatefully and offensively prosperous and happy.' I have all I want: I have been a spoilt child of fortune all my life, and it has made me selfish and heartless. I am so very sorry, Mr. Chauncey, that you should have been induced, through my behaviour, to speak as you have done this morning; and more sorry than I can express, when I think that we must lose your pleasant society, as we shall do when you decide on joining Lord Lonville and his yachting crew. Let us forget this, if you please. I will not betray your confidence—of course you believe that?"

Well concealed behind a tall folding-screen which stood open near the entrance to the conservatory from the drawing-room, Lady

Cockburn was listening, her eyes brilliant, her hands clasped together in a fervent ecstasy of triumph.

"I care not whom you tell of your conquest," said Lancelot, in a subdued voice. "I am not ashamed—nay, I am rather proud of my love for you. But I choose to believe, in spite of what you have just now said to me, that you are not so perfectly without feeling as you imagine yourself to be; that the time will come—and if it does, oh! pity me then—when you will love, love some one less unworthy of you than I, and your fresh, untried heart may ache for love, as mine does now. But I pray God for your happiness, Diane, you sweet, pure angel! I would die could it keep the slightest trouble from your path. Good-bye, my first and only love—good-bye! When we meet again, this morning will probably have faded from your memory, and perhaps you may let me be your friend once more. Luna—*darling*—say one kind word to me before I go!"

"Bon voyage, Monsieur," was all the marble lips would utter, as Diane rose.

Lancelot stood by the door. She advanced

whilst speaking, and put her hand in his. He seized both her wrists, and looked for an instant into her dark, tearless eyes, then broke from her, and was gone.

Lady Cockburn, escaping from her post of observation through the garden, waited for Lancelot in the hall. She looked at him interrogatively, waiting for him to speak.

"You were misled, Lady Cockburn," he said quietly, "and I have made a most unfortunate mistake. I must bid you farewell, as I shall have gone from here in a few hours."

She was not so false-minded as to condole with him; she let him pass, and hastened into the drawing-room.

Hardly had the door closed upon her lover ere Diane's pride had vanished to give place to the feeling that she must recall him, unsay her words, and accept the heart he offered her, even if it were but the paltry, worthless thing she feared.

"How close the day is!" she gasped faintly, as Margaretta entered; "there is thunder in the air—see—" as she drew up the blind and pointed to the heavy clouds that were gathering, "there will be rain—Mrs. Carewe

and Harrie—the open carriage—only parasols——" and she fell senseless on the floor.

"Minnie, I am off at two o'clock," said Lancelot, bursting into his cousin's room, where she was teaching her eldest little girl her lessons.

"Off where? Don't go away, Lancey!" cried the child.

"Lance, my dear, what is the matter? Norah darling, run away to the nursery," said Minnie, looking frightened. "Now I am sure something is the matter with Fred! Oh, don't keep it from me, Lancelot!"

Lancelot laughed harshly. "Did you not hear from him this morning, and is he not coming to you this week? I have no news of him, you dear little goose. No, I am only going to join Lonville. I have paid you a visit of preposterous length, you must be well sick of me—and—rejected suitors generally retire, and since I left you, half an hour ago, I have made a fool of myself, and received the answer I deserved."

"Lancelot!" Minnie exclaimed breathlessly.

"Yes; I was encouraged, partly by what Lady Cockburn said, to believe that Diane

cared for me. I loved her so much, that I thought she must like me a little in return. I was a fool to speak to her, I know; but it was getting such misery to me to see her and be with her."

"If you proposed, and she refused you, she has flirted disgracefully——" Minnie began indignantly; but Lancelot stopped her with,

"You shall not say so, you must not think it; she has given me no cause to think she cared for me. My compliments, whilst they were merely such, she received for what they were worth, plainly showing that she despised them; and since I have known that I adored her so madly, she has ignored all idea of my being in earnest when talking to her; she has ever made me feel that, as a friend, my attentions were welcome to her, but as a *prétendu*, or a lover, she would not receive them. I have grown into loving her without any chance of return, and I believe now that I love her all the more passionately for knowing that I cannot win her: her innocence and coldness set her apart from other women, and if she were made of such stuff as to love a

thing like me, I should never have come to revere and worship her as I do. Dear little Min, best of women, my more than sister, it has been a sort of comfort to say all this to you; you may tell Fred, if you like, the reason of my sudden departure—I know you would have told him, without my leave—you tell him everything, do you not? We shall meet again in London in the winter, and in the mean time you will write to me and let me know when she is to marry that beast, will you not? When Lonville's party breaks up I shall join the regiment at Windsor. Good-bye, my pet; don't look so sorry for me, as if my one *affaire de cœur* was going to kill me. 'Men have died,' you know, 'and worms have eaten them, but not for love!' I shall *seem* all right in a week, even if I am not really so. I suppose every man when he is in love imagines no one alive ever equalled his depth of loving, and of course I feel like that at present. Minnie, you will be Diane's friend, won't you? Don't be riled with her for refusing me; be kind to her, if only for my sake, because I ask it of you."

Lancelot, in an hour's time, had left Ted-

dington, and before the next evening was on board Lord Lonville's yacht "Stella," an agreeable addition to a bright, merry party, where we will leave him for the present, to show how Diane endured the desolation that his loss occasioned her.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Nessun maggior dolore
Che ricordarsi del tempo felice
Nella miseria."

THE knowledge that Mrs. Vane Emerton was of the party in Lord Lonville's yacht "Stella," and the belief that in her brilliant society Lancelot was forgetting all about the heiress for whose money he had been willing to abandon his pleasant bachelor life, did not help to make Diane less miserable; and though her behaviour was perfect, and she listened with attention and apparent interest to Lady Cockburn's advice as to the details of her *trousseau*, or the whereabouts and furniture of the new home she was to have in London the following year, she grew daily more pale and shadowy, less able to bear the torture of her cousin's

presence, the sort of half-pitying badinage of her manner, and a way she had of suddenly flashing her great brown eyes in Diane's direction whenever Mr. Chauncey's name was casually mentioned. There was naturally a show of confidence between the two, though each had her own secret to guard. Lady Cockburn's was safe enough: indeed, few natures, even though more worldly-wise than my heroine's, would have suspected any one of such treachery and deceit; but Diane could not so entirely dissemble but that the other was touched with qualms of conscience and pity. There was ever before her eyes the wreck her manœuvring had accomplished, with Diane an unloved, not appreciated, and neglected wife, succumbing to the temptations and follies of fashionable life. For Lancelot, too, she was sorry, having a real liking for the man who, she felt, would so honourably have preserved the secret of his passion, had it not been for her half-mocking persuasions to him that he had worked an impression on her poor little cousin's heart, and her suggestion and recommendation that he should win for himself a loving wife and a large fortune.

The memory of his face that morning, when Diane had watched them from her window as they conversed across the paling, and she had said to him that she hoped ere long to address him as "Lancelot, her cousin," and he had replied, "God bless you, Lady Cockburn, for your generous friendship!" haunted her, even after she had left the dulness and monotony of Riverbank behind her, and was busily engaged in the cares and responsibilities of hospitality at her home in Scotland. Her anxiety would have been increased had she known that Gussie returned to England about the time of her departure from Riverbank, and that, so far from the image of Harriette Field being erased from his mind, the young man had half determined, if she really loved him, to marry her, and be contented to live quietly and economically upon his unpresuming seven thousand a-year.

Miss Field not being aware of this decision, and finding the routine of Diane's house, broken as it was only by an occasional luncheon or garden party at Mrs. Burnaby's, somewhat monotonous, had yielded to her aunt's persuasion that she would accompany her to

Plymouth, which had been the home of the latter during Mr. Carewe's lifetime, and where she had still a great many friends. But the arrival of Lord Kildorin, on a short visit at Thamis Cottage, rather altered Harriette's mind, and she began to wish that she had not promised to leave Riverbank with Mrs. Carewe, and at last plainly told her aunt that she must go without her, for that she would not give up the chance of happiness that seemed opening for her. Young, warmhearted, and impressionable, the Hibernian Viscount would have fallen, had she so chosen, an easy victim to Harrie's charms, even had not her own fancy been attracted by the fresh novelty of his style, his bright, racy manner, and his handsome face and figure.

Poor Mrs. Carewe experienced the greatest uneasiness concerning the alteration and excitement that seemed to come so suddenly upon her niece, which she could not attribute to love for Lord Kildorin, not believing that her heart was capable of any tenderness of feeling. Harriette had grown gentler, and fonder in her manner, towards the little widow, lately, when they were alone, and seemed more inclined

than usual to talk freely on her plans and aspirations.

They had received the news, one morning, that Gussie might be expected by dinner-time; and in the course of the day, when the aunt and niece were alone, Mrs. Carewe timidly asked,

"Harrie, darling, do you suppose Mr. Deshon will offer to you now?"

"How do I know?" said Harriette, rather savagely. "He sneaked off because that woman managed that he should, and now he sneaks back again. Cur! I dare say he will propose, but I trust it will not be till I am able to tell him that I am going to become Madame la Vicomtesse."

"Dear girl! of course you are joking: you were always fond of your fun!"

"I am far from joking. I have great faith in my own fascinations, and the Kildorins are more passionate than the milk-and-water boy-doll I have been playing with, and of whom I am so odiously sick. Tell me, Aunt Lucy, would not your snobbish relations like to talk of 'their connection, the Viscountess'?"

"Oh, Harrie, it seems in such bad taste."

"Bah! bad taste? I should call it just atonement, or the reward of merit."

"I do not see the merit," said Mrs. Carewe a little impatiently. Harriette was walking about the room, looking tragic. "The merit of having held my tongue, and kept my temper," she said.

"Kept your temper, my poor child! Your temper may be less violent than it was, but I think it is hardly less bitter and vindictive."

"Yes, it is," said Miss Field; "the time is past and gone, for ever, I believe, when I would have *killed* a man who played with and deceived me; nor do I now wish any real harm, even to this puppy, Gussie Deshon; the utmost revenge I shall care to take on him will be to deceive him, to fool him a little more, and then tell him I am going to marry Lord Kildorin."

As she said this name her voice and face softened, and something made her aunt rise and kiss her. Instead of, as usual, rebuffing her caress, Harriette put her arm round the little woman's neck, and, bursting into a great stormy passion of tears, confessed that her whole heart's happiness depended upon the truth of Lord Kildorin's fancied love.

Nothing in a small way is more interesting to lookers on than the least suspicion of a love affair, and it was a subject of almost hourly self-congratulation with Diane, that her aunt and Mrs. Carewe had something to divert their attention from her own drooping looks, which had been a subject of anxiety with the faithful, devoted Emma, even before Lancelot's departure. It is true, Mrs. Deshon took to inflicting upon her niece cod-liver oil, quinine, and incidental doses of port wine, in consequence of that fainting fit, which Lady Cockburn would willingly have kept secret, had it been in her power to do so, "but," as Mrs. Carewe consolingly observed, when she entered the room just as Diane's blanched lips began to be tinged with a slight returning colour, "thundery weather often caused people of any delicacy of constitution to feel unwell, and when *she* was a girl hardly a Sunday passed without several people going out of church faint;" and Diane only laughed, and made wry faces over her tonics, declaring that she was far too strong and well really to require them, believing in her heart that she would never regain her health unless she went away, far away from

that place, where everything helped to remind her of Lancelot, and that her only chance of peace was that Gussie should take her abroad directly they were married, that she might seek calm and oblivion in those scenes she had been accustomed to before the wakening to life, the finding of a soul, that this summer had been.

But this idea faded as the dangerous determination strengthened that she would see him, triumph over her weakness, and, if it were possible to be *mere friends* with one who had so humbled himself before her, and whom she could not yet help loving and forgiving for the cruel worldly falseness of his heart, once more to resume the happy life of the past glorious sunny weeks.

But the same wave never comes back to kiss the pebbles it has just left cool and glistening; the flowers we pick this year are not the same that grew last summer; the blossoms we again shall gather, although so like, are different from those we behold to-day. And how could a new time be to Diane and Lancelot as it had been, as it might longer have continued, but for that fatal interview between them?

Could Diane have had the benefit of Mrs. Ross's friendship and society just then, it must have been a comfort to her, even though she still maintained her attempts at the concealment of her misery; but Minnie, though vexed at herself for not feeling able to comply with her cousin's desire that she should remain staunch and loyal to Diane, could not help blaming her in her heart, and believing her vain, frivolous, and proud of her triumph over Lancelot. Though she tried hard to prevent any diminution of affection in her manner towards her when they met, yet their meetings became so far less frequent than heretofore, and Diane was sadly conscious of a difference in her friend; and though she knew that her conduct had not really warranted Minnie's increasing coldness, that knowledge did not avail to make her trouble one whit the less difficult to endure.

Harriette Field, in Diane's purple drawing-room, had warbled out her conviction that "there's nothing half so sweet in life as love's young dream," so many times, and to such good purpose, that Lord Kildorin had been led to agree with her, and had cast

his honest heart and damaged fortune at her feet before Gussie's return. It had been quick work, but there is a saying that "Happy's the wooing that's not long a-doing," and in that quiet Teddington life were so many opportunities for love-making, that it was not very much to be wondered at, but the engagement was not made public directly; and when Gussie came back, his natural conceit, and the admirable duplicity of Harriette, who, despite her deep affection for her noble lover, could not resist the temptation of again subjugating the man whom she had once so ardently desired to marry, led him into the belief that she encouraged Lord Kildorin merely to pique himself, and, more than ever in love with her, in part, perhaps, from the existence of a formidable rival, and dawning doubt as to whether his suit would be successful, he made up his mind one morning, as he walked up and down the garden, smoking, that the deed should be done without further delay.

"Confound it!" he mused, "she is riled at me for not coming to the scratch, and thinks to bring me to book by flirting with Kildorin." Lord Kildorin, be it observed, was in the

drawing-room with her at that moment, though Gussie was not aware of the circumstance. "But perhaps she believes I have only been trifling with her, and cares about me too much; poor girl!—I dare say she likes me deucedly. Poor dear Harrie! Shall I now?" Throwing away the end of his cigar, he took a shilling from his waistcoat pocket, and spun it in the air. "Heads! By Jove, what a row there'll be!—stay, best out of three;" and he again flung up the coin, "Head again—I, Augustus, take thee, Harriette—Corpo di Baccho! Well," with a sigh, "'If 'twere done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well it was done quickly.' I think I'll see Di first, and tell her—no, I won't, I'll go and get it over."

So he lounged up to the drawing-room window, and stood for amoment outside—not a long time, but long enough to show him that his determination had arrived too late.

He would have turned away, but Harriette perceived him, and colouring violently, escaped from the arm that circled her waist as she sat at the piano, and hurried out of the room, whilst Lord Kildorin cried out,

"Ah, my boy, you're not the only lucky dog alive that's got a pretty sweetheart: I've been accepted by that splendid girl."

Gussie "congratulated his dear fellow," expressed himself "deuced glad to hear it," and offered to be best man at the wedding, and like a young philosopher, whilst inwardly blessing Providence that he had not made fool enough of himself to tell Harriette that he loved her, and bestowing a hearty imprecation on the lady's perfidy and fickleness, decided in his own mind that it was a very good thing for him, and that the income of which, in a short time, as Diane's husband, he would be master, was worth more to him than a passing *tendresse* for a woman who could in so short a time jilt him in favour of a paltry Irish Viscount, with a crippled fortune and a blighted name.

END OF VOL. I.

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